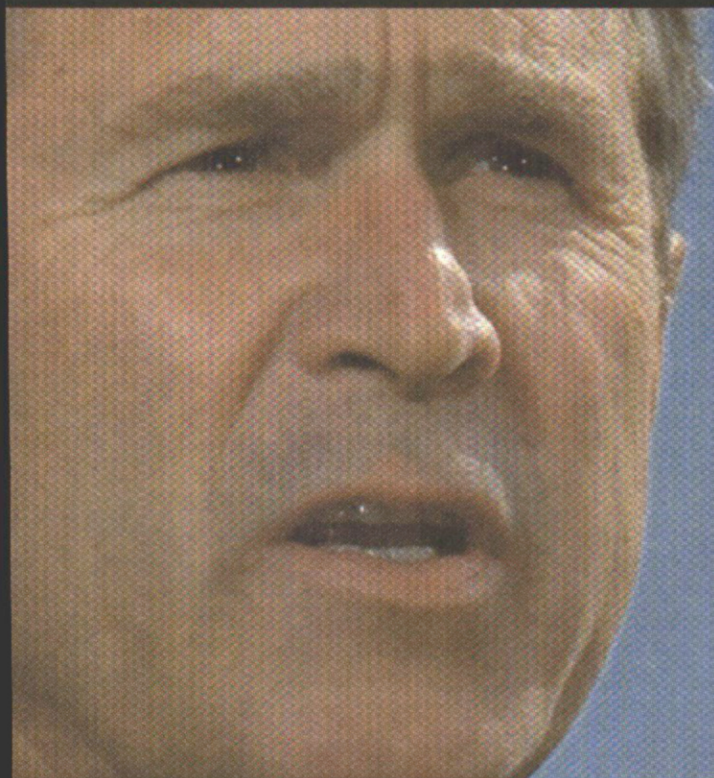


A SHOCK TO THE CENSUS • ZAPATOUR • OPERATION QUEEN ESTHER

In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

April 16, 2001



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WHAT'S YOUR ANTI-DRUG?

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WILL BE MORE
CONSERVATIVE THAN
COMPASSIONATE**

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

**EASY TARGETS: THE DRUG
WAR TEARS THROUGH A
SMALL TEXAS TOWN**

BY JASMINA KELEMEN



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In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

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Publisher's Notes

During the 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush focused on a five-point program: tax cuts, education spending, military spending, revision of entitlement programs (Medicare and Social Security) and federal funding of faith-based social programs. On February 27, our so-called "MBA president" presented the details of his cornerstone initiative—the tax cut plan. As a fellow MBA, and someone who has prepared many budgets and plans, I find his proposals to be deeply flawed.

Bush's big numbers don't hold up. He says the tax cut will cost \$1.6 trillion over 10 years. However, the plan makes the tax cut retroactive to January 1 of this year, and some of the funds previously allocated to pay down the national debt are instead used for the tax cut program. Therefore, \$400 billion in additional interest and tax cuts would accrue over the 10 years of the plan.

Further, while the tax cut would greatly benefit the richest 1 percent of the population (which would get about 43 percent of the benefit), most of this group would be thrown into the "alternative minimum tax" (AMT) category, part of the tax code designed to keep this group from using loopholes to avoid paying taxes altogether. Thus, unless the AMT portions of the tax code were to be revised, this group would pay approximately the same taxes as they do now. Revising the AMT to ensure that the richest 1 percent would keep their tax cut, would cost an additional \$400 billion. Thus the realistic cost of the Bush tax cut plan would probably be \$2.4 trillion—50 percent more than advertised.

Bush says that the tax cut will come out of an estimated \$5.6 trillion surplus developed over 10 years. Modern businesses seldom forecast budget numbers beyond three years and almost never beyond five years. The problem with forecasting on a 10-year basis is that inaccuracy is inevitable—in this case, the result will be massive deficits, as happened in the Reagan era.

Even if the \$5.6 trillion surplus were to hold up, that surplus minus the necessary Social Security and Medicare payments doesn't leave enough in the budget for forecasted growth in domestic spending. \$5.6 trillion minus \$2.4 trillion for a tax cut expense leaves \$3.2 trillion. This

amount less \$3 trillion for Social Security and Medicare results in \$200 billion for all growth in domestic spending over the 10-year tax cut period. This is 20 percent of the \$1 trillion that Bush claims to have set aside for contingencies and far less than the 4 percent annual growth he projects.

Finally, the budget for the first year doesn't make sense. A detailed budget has not been developed—in its place is a flimsy document with comments such as "the final distribution of offsets has yet to be determined." (An "offset" is an unknown spending cut.) Since we don't know what these cuts are, we can't determine their consequences.

However, we can make educated guesses about unspecified budget increases for fiscal year 2002, based upon two well-established Bush priorities: education and defense. Education is up 11.5 percent—\$4.6 billion more than this year. Rep. George Miller (D-California) suggests that the final number will be considerably higher. For example, fully funding Head Start would take an additional \$3.3 billion per year.

Defense gets a 4.8 percent increase—to \$14.2 billion, of which \$5.7 billion goes to military pay raises. Since Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is conducting a review of the current weapons systems, it is likely that later in the year more money will be requested to "modernize" them. Also, it is certain that Bush will ask Congress for money to pursue the National Missile Defense system.

If our "MBA president" were a CEO of a large business and proposed across-the-board pay raises for the employees (with the

As a fellow MBA, I find the "MBA" president's budget and tax cut proposals to be deeply flawed.

executives getting the lion's share), the directors and the stockholders would ask a basic question: How would the proposal affect future profitability and this year's plan and budget? If CEO Bush could not come up with a reasonable answer, he would be fired. If only we had such a choice.

As always, I look forward to hearing from you at bburnett@inthesetimes.com.

Bob Burnett

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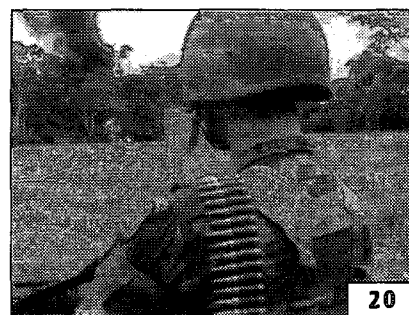
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Letters

Pure Feingold

Aris Anagnos of Los Angeles claims he will not support Wisconsin Sen. Russ Feingold for president in 2004 because Feingold voted to confirm John Ashcroft (Letters, March 19). In Wisconsin, we are almost accustomed to Feingold surprising us with positions based on principles rather than politics. We may not always agree, but we understand this reliance on principle is also what led Feingold to oppose the Anti-Terrorism Act because it expanded the federal death penalty. If what you want is a different kind of politician, then you must expect him to act differently.

John Lepinski
Appleton, Wisconsin

Labor's Survival

Frankly, I was disappointed that David Moberg's piece "Labor's Critical Condition" (March 5) failed to mention the most inhibiting factor to union growth of the past 30-plus years. Workers can't go on strike for union recognition and contract bargaining and be reinstated, so the employer can intimidate and even destroy the workers' initiative. In my opinion, every candidate for House or Senate should be litmus-tested on this issue in the next several elections—and union voters should be prepared to work only for supportive candidates. About 10 years ago, striker reinstatement legislation came close to passage. Labor needs to revive this movement if it is to survive its truly critical condition.

Stanley G. House
Wilmington, North Carolina

Ralph Redux

We were disheartened, then soon disgusted, as we experienced James Weinstein's gathering of timbers and nails yet again to crucify Nader enthusiasts ("Let's Crash the Party," February 19). Do we really need to hear that "the fiasco was brought about last November by Ralph Nader"? It's this kind of browbeating of the more idealistic readers that makes us realize how easy it is for people to compromise into supporting someone like Al Gore.

Glazed-eyed participation in lesser-of-two-evils strategies has ratcheted the nation ever farther to the right. Don't listen to us—read history. And don't ask us to compromise. We would rather be "marginalized" in our real convictions than co-opted by the compromised New Democrats. As for "human need above corporate profitability," the Democrats we've been watching don't hesitate to jump through corporate hoops.

Jan and Patrick Pesek-Herriges
Clayton, Wisconsin

Doug Ireland suggests that Ralph Nader may have "missed the moment," so to speak, and I will admit that I was wondering why he wasn't right in the middle of the Florida recount fiasco making a stink ("Looking for Mr. Nader," March 5). But that's not his style. If you check the IndyMedia D.C. Web site, you'll see that Nader was talking with the folks who were rocking the inaugural boat and spreading the word on how this is yet just another fine example of what has happened to electoral politics. He is doing what he has always done, speaking truth to power and inspiring others to do likewise.

The congressional Democrats are in the process of proving that they are spoiled rotten, spineless and basically useless in fighting the Bushies. As Nader often said during the campaign, he's not looking to be a leader, he's looking to inspire others to lead. I like that, and so do a lot of other folks. Mine was not a "protest" vote. It was a vote of liberation from the quagmire of Republican politics. Don't worry about the Naderites. We are here, there and everywhere—now and in the future. We ain't going back.

Eric Oines
Minneapolis

While Doug Ireland poses some reasonable educated guesses about why Ralph Nader has stayed out of the spotlight, he has neglected the most obvious possible reason. Perhaps Nader has kept a low profile because he finally realizes the damage he has wrought. A Green Party nominee whose candidacy is directly responsible for Gail Norton, John Ashcroft, Christie Todd Whitman and other nightmares should be ashamed, and should stay out of the spotlight.

Steven Bennett
Washington

Fascinating how Doug Ireland minimizes the election dispute in Florida to a "squabbling over the vote count." That's the usual pie-in-the-sky Naderite ignorance of reality. Counting all votes is the essence of democracy. As to both Nader and the Greens: Wake up and bury the dead. The Green Party is dead—only in part because it is out-of-touch, far-left and focused on few (if any) issues. And Nader as a candidate is dead. Grow up, dump both fantasies, and learn the real differences between pro-environment Democrats and anti-environment Republicans. And stop lying about the reality: Nader took 90,000 votes in Florida—enough to make it possible for Bush to steal the election. Stupid is as stupid does. And then it compounds itself by lying to avoid the issue.

Joseph Nagarya
Boston

I understand how a misguided but principled fellow might have mistakenly supported Nader in the election, but how can he then turn around and express outrage at Democratic senators for only "token" opposition to the appointments of John Ashcroft, Gale Norton and Christie Todd Whitman? Doesn't Doug Ireland see the connection between his own actions and those appointments? There was unintended, knife-twisting irony in Ireland's closing comment about Nader failing to understand "the hard-nosed real world of electoral politics." Ouch. Wake up, guy.

John Douglas
Charleston, South Carolina

My friends, family and I supported Nader and took heat for it from local pols. While leafletting at an el stop, my daughter got yelled at by Jan Schakowsky—our Democratic House rep, and not a bad one either—whom we voted for anyway. This is in the way of bona fides: I'm not speaking from the sidelines.

All of us think Nader should have gone public—at least on his own Web site—during the Florida preliminaries to what turned out to be the real contest, Shrub's elevation (not election) by the U.S. Supreme Court. Especially at the risk, if not guarantee, of Republican opprobrium, Nader should have insisted that each vote be counted, or sought a revote. This would have redounded to his credit within his base and among his supporters who had been scared into voting for Gore. Absent that struggle, he should at least have surfaced to thank his supporters and explain why—in light of Bush's extra-electoral selection—Nader's two and a half percent had not wasted their efforts, their hopes and their votes, not to mention their next four years.

All of which leads me to conclude, for now, that since his defeat, Nader has not shown the skills, perseverance or imagination—or maybe just the commitment (one doesn't say character)—to be the oppositional leader of a national movement in the United States. Electoral mobilization is not enough to sustain momentum—let alone hope—with only one national election every two years. So either Nader adds extra-parliamentary means to his lobbying and running for office, or he's history—probably a footnote.

Sheldon Silver
Chicago

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Yikes! It's Otto Reich

By Joel Bleifuss

Good soldiers get promoted, and Otto Reich, the designated assistant secretary of state for Latin America, was a good soldier—a veteran of the Reagan-Bush administration's Iran-contra scandal.

Reich's nomination bodes ill, first for Latin Americans who must fear his support of the region's most extreme political forces (he is director of the Center for a Free Cuba in Washington), and second for Americans (particularly journalists) who were the object of Reich's covert attentions in the '80s.

Reich served the Reagan administration from 1983 to 1986 as director of the newly created Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean. From his post in the State Department, Reich commanded a unit of PSYOPS (psychological operations) specialists who ran a covert domestic propaganda campaign to sell the American people, the media and Congress on the administration's wars against leftists in Central America.

Corporate supporters of the Republicans were instrumental. A National Security Council staff member wrote in a 1983 memo: "A group of public relations specialists met with [CIA Director] Bill Casey a few days ago. ... The group included Bill Greener, the public affairs head at Phillip Morris, and two or three others. They 'stated' what needed to be done to generate a nationwide campaign. ... an effective communications system inside the government. The overall purpose would be to sell a 'new product'—Central America—by generating interest across-the-spectrum."

That "inside" system was Reich's Office of Public Diplomacy, which drew up an "Action Plan" to ensure "congressional passage of aid to the Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters. ... Overall theme: The Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters are fighters for freedom in the American tradition, FSLN [Sandinistas] are evil. ... Audiences: U.S. Congress, U.S. media, interest groups."

Public Diplomacy staffing was provided by the Pentagon, which assigned to

Washington five members of the Army's 4th Psychological Operations Group at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In a memo to Reich, a subordinate wrote: "Whatever you want done by your 'A-team,' just pass on to me." He went on to praise the new "troops" including a "PSYOPS type" who will "be looking for exploitable themes and trends, and will inform us of possible areas for our exploitation."

Reich was a hands-on propagandist. In a memo to President Reagan, Secretary of State George Shultz praised Reich for helping "improve the quality of information the American people are receiving." As an example, Shultz mentioned a spring 1984 CBS *Evening News* report from El Salvador that "conveyed a deceptive image favorable to the guerrillas." Reich paid a visit to CBS and spent hours with the guilty CBS correspondent and CBS news executives. This was done, Shultz wrote, not in "an effort to embarrass anyone, but simply to try to point out flaws in the information the American people are receiving. So far everyone at CBS

has been very cordial and cooperative with Ambassador Reich."

Shultz added that such visits have "been repeated dozens of times over the past few months." Like when Reich visited National Public Radio, and raged about the network's coverage of CIA's covert war against the Sandinistas. According to NPR's Bill Buzenberg, Reich warned NPR news editors that he had "a special consultant service listening to all NPR programs."

A 1988 report by the House Foreign Affairs Committee, concluded: "Senior CIA officials with backgrounds in covert operations, as well as military intelligence and psychological operations specialists from the Department of Defense, were deeply involved in

Shultz praised Reich for improving "the quality of information the American people are receiving."

establishing and participating in a domestic political and propaganda operation ... designed to lobby Congress, manipulate the media and influence domestic public opinion."

The public never heard of any of this. In the late '80s, Reich and company got a pass from both Congress and a cowed media. Let's not repeat that mistake. Otto Reich's nomination is one that all defenders of a free press should oppose. ■

Terry LaBan



Zapapalooza On tour with Mexico's rebel road show

By Rick Mercier

MEXICO CITY—Seven years after stunning the world with their daring uprising, a delegation of Zapatista rebels came out of hiding in the Lacandon Jungle and traveled to the concrete jungle of Mexico City to try to resolve the simmering conflict in Chiapas.

Twenty-four Zapatista leaders, including the rebels' spokesman and military strategist, Subcomandante Marcos, set out on a 12-state, 15-day road trip dubbed "Zapatour" by the Mexican media. The rebels hoped to boost popular support for a bill before the Mexican Congress that would grant indigenous communities greater autonomy, fulfilling one of the preconditions they set for resuming peace talks with the government.

The Zapatistas have always contended that they do not want to seize power, and that their ultimate goal is to disappear. "A soldier, and I include myself, is an absurd and irrational man, because he has the capacity to resort to violence to persuade," Marcos said in a television interview on March 10, the eve of the rebels' triumphant entry into Mexico City, where they were greeted by 150,000 people in the capital's massive central square.

Talks between the rebels and government broke down in 1996 after former President Ernesto Zedillo refused to submit the indigenous rights bill to Congress for a vote. Zedillo's recalcitrance outraged the Zapatistas because the bill had been crafted by a nonpartisan legislative committee to enshrine in the nation's constitution an agreement on indigenous rights—known as the San Andres Accords—that the

rebels and government negotiators had signed earlier in the year.

With the election of Vicente Fox as president, many believe it's time to break the deadlock between the Zapatistas and the government. "This is a good moment to link the peace process with the political transformation to democracy," says Miguel Alvarez, former general secretary of the National Mediation Commission, which helped the rebels and government reach their 1996 agreement.

Fox, who submitted the indigenous rights bill to Congress immediately after his inauguration in December, arguably has been the biggest beneficiary of the rebel movement. Many observers acknowledge that the Zapatistas and their sympathizers throughout Mexico pressured Zedillo to back electoral

For Brown and the nearly 2,000 others who rode in the caravan, traveling with the rebels offered a chance to be part of an historic moment in Mexico. The significance of Zapatour could be understood not just by observing the size of the crowds at caravan stops (in all, nearly a quarter of a million people filled town squares to see and hear the rebel delegation at events held on their way to the capital), but also by listening to the stories of some of the individuals who attended the events. One older indigenous woman from Puebla state started walking from her mountain village at 3 a.m. to get to the town of Tehuacan in time to witness the late-morning arrival of the Zapatistas. An Amuzgo man from the Sierra Madre highlands in Guerrero state walked for nine days with 400 people to be on hand for the rebels' arrival in Mexico City.

In spite of the enthusiasm the rebels generated during Zapatour, proponents of the indigenous rights bill face an uphill battle in the Mexican Congress. Since the bill would amend the Mexican Constitution, it must be approved by a two-thirds vote, and so far most of Mexico's political establishment has balked at the idea of granting self-determination to indigenous communities.

Opponents say that establishing autonomous communities throughout the country could lead to the balkanization of Mexico. But the Zapatistas have insisted that they do

not seek to break away. "It's not true that we want to separate from Mexico," said the rebels' Comandanta Susana at a tour stop on the outskirts of Mexico City. "What we want is for them to recognize us as the indigenous people we are, but also as Mexicans."

Opponents also argue that autonomy would perpetuate the marginalization of women in indigenous communities. However, the bill explicitly mandates gender equality. Referring to this provision of the bill, Comandanta Yolanda said that Zapatista women want "the law



Comandante Tacho and Subcomandante Marcos enter Mexico City.

reforms that enabled Fox to beat the candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which had held the presidency for 71 years.

Many people, including Fox, have compared Zapatour to the big marches of the U.S. civil rights movement. Former San Diego high school teacher Peter Brown, who helped build a junior high school in Oventic, Chiapas, says the Zapatista rebellion "is like having the civil rights movement alive and well, with Malcolm X and H. Rap Brown right next to Martin Luther King."

to be approved because it protects women. The participation of indigenous women will be in the Constitution."

A more accurate explanation for the opposition may be that autonomous indigenous communities would have more power to oversee—or block—efforts to exploit valuable natural resources in their territory. This is especially relevant to Chiapas, where, according to geological surveys, large oil and natural gas reserves lie underneath land inhabited by communities that have sided with the Zapatistas.

Given Fox's strong pro-business beliefs, the Zapatistas remain skeptical about his commitment to a just peace. Marcos recently accused the president of wanting to fast-track a solution that would improve his popularity rating but not ensure the safety of Zapatista communities. At a caravan stop in Hidalgo state, Marcos said Fox wanted to turn the dove of peace "into an advertising logo." In another speech in Hidalgo, Marcos reminded the crowd that a group of pacifist indigenous people in the Chiapas highlands had signed an informal peace agreement with government-backed paramilitaries in 1997, only to be slaughtered two weeks later. "Is this the peace you want?" he asked the crowd, which responded with a resounding no.

The Zapatistas have reason to worry about what may lie ahead. Even if the indigenous rights bill passes and a peace deal is reached, local PRI strongmen, wealthy landowners, paramilitary groups and the military could all fight to prevent demilitarization and autonomy in Chiapas.

And, as official figures suggest, the general poverty and isolation of Mexico's indigenous people loom as problems even more difficult to overcome in the long run. According to recently released government data, more than half of the country's indigenous children are malnourished. More than six in 10 indigenous adults are illiterate, compared with one in 10 adults nationally. And a mere 42 percent of indigenous homes have running water, compared with 84 percent of all homes in Mexico. In the indigenous areas of Chiapas, there is one doctor for every 25,000 residents, a situation comparable to Ghana or Cambodia.

Yet, even with all the obstacles, some are optimistic that the Zapatistas and the government can achieve a just peace in Chiapas. The coming weeks "will not be the last opportunity" for peace, Alvarez says. If the two sides do not find mutually acceptable conditions for an agreement this time around, he adds, "they will keep looking for conditions and will try again." ■

No Secret NAFTA's side agreement fails to protect workers

By David Bacon

RIO BRAVO, MEXICO—NAFTA's advocates promised that free trade would bring a new era of respect for workers rights in the North America. Especially south of the border, they said, the treaty's labor side agreement would ensure that workers could vote freely for the unions of their choice in clean elections by secret ballot. But a recent election at the huge Duro bag plant in Rio Bravo, just across the border from Texas, could become a symbol of how those promises have been broken. And with more promises on the horizon—as the Bush administration pushes for fast-track authority to extend the treaty across the whole Western Hemisphere—Duro may become the poster child for NAFTA's failure to protect workers rights.

On March 2, voting began inside the Duro factory, where workers labor around the clock cutting and gluing fancy paper bags for the U.S. gift market. On the ballot were two unions—the Union of Duro Bag Workers, an independent union organized by rank-and-file workers, and the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants (CROC), a company union affiliated with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Mexico's former ruling party.

The stage was set the day before, when observers outside the plant watched automatic weapons being unloaded from a car and carried into the plant. That night, workers from the swing and graveyard shifts were pre-



DAVID BACON

American protesters outside the Duro plant.

vented from leaving. Instead, they were held for hours in a room blocked off with metal sheets and huge rolls of paper. A few observers from the independent union later reported that they could hear cries of "let us out!" until company managers began playing music at deafening volume on the plant speaker system.

The next morning, workers from the day shift were escorted to the voting area by CROC organizers, who handed them slips of paper printed with the union's local number. At the voting table, representatives of Mexico's national labor board asked workers to declare their choices out loud. Company foremen and government-affiliated union representatives took notes. In the end, only 502 people voted out of a work force of more than 1,400. Only four of them openly declared their support for the independent union. "The Duro election is clearly a tragic defeat for the workers," says Robin Alexander, director of international relations for the U.S.-based United Electrical Workers, which supported the independent union. "I hope the violations here will serve as a wake-up call."

Duro's vice-president of manufacturing, Bill Forstrom, says wages at Rio Bravo start at \$6 a day. "We're in

Mexico to take advantage of inexpensive labor," Forstrom admits.

According to Eliud Almaguer, a fired rank-and-file leader from the Rio Bravo plant, many people have lost fingers in machinery because of fast production and little protection. Such poor wages and working conditions have led to a long history of agitation at the plant.

Ludlow, Kentucky-based Duro Bag Manufacturing Corporation also operates seven U.S. plants. For years, Duro has paid local leaders of the Paper, Cardboard and Wood Industry Union to guarantee labor peace at the plant. The union is part of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), which has been a pillar of support for the country's ruling bureaucracy since the '40s. Two years ago, workers in the Duro plant decided to challenge that contract and elect reform-minded union leaders, including Almaguer. That led to Almaguer's firing in October 1999 and a work stoppage a year ago, when 150 more workers were terminated. The CTM then signed a new agreement with Duro, with none of the higher wages and increased safety demands the workers were seeking. The Rio Bravo plant began organizing an independent union in response.

When the election finally took place this March, none of the fired workers were allowed into the plant to vote. The CTM, which had grown increasingly unpopular, withdrew from the process the morning of the election and was replaced by the CROC. Many

workers didn't even know the name of the union they were told to vote for.

During the past year, however, Duro workers have been supported from the north by the San Antonio-based Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, a coalition of North American unions, churches and community organizations. Help also came from Mexico's new independent labor federation, the National Union of Workers (UNT), based in Mexico City. Last summer they pressured the governor of Tamaulipas state, where the plant is located, into granting the independent union legal status.

The company's legal battle was handled by attorneys from the Mexican employers' association, COPARMEX, the equivalent of the U.S. National Association of Manufacturers. This has been very beneficial to Duro—Mexico's new Labor Secretary Carlos Abascal was formerly the chief of COPARMEX. When Duro's independent union presented its petition for election to Abascal, they requested it be held on neutral ground with a secret ballot. Abascal denied the request, and the federal labor board, under his control, went on to administer the balloting in Rio Bravo.


Abascal's orders violated an agreement negotiated between his predecessor, Mariano Palacios Alcocer, and former U.S. Labor Secretary Alexis Herman. That agreement grew out of two celebrated cases filed under the NAFTA labor side agreement—at the Han Young plant in Tijuana, and the ITAPSA plant in Mexico City. Abascal's decision to ignore it is one more dent in NAFTA's already-tattered credibility.

Since NAFTA went into effect in January 1994, more than 20 complaints have been filed under the labor side agreement. Almost all have charged that Mexico does not enforce laws guaranteeing workers the right to form unions of their choice, and to strike effectively when they do. But nothing has been done to rehire a single fired worker, nor has a single independent union been able to negotiate a contract. In Tijuana last June, independent unionists from the Han Young factory were even beaten and expelled from a public meeting about workers rights called by the Mexican government (see "Tijuana Troubles," August 21, 2000).

U.S. officials present at the time made no public protest over the violence and expulsions. But they did boast about one outcome of the Han Young case: According to Lewis Karesh, a former deputy U.S. labor secretary who headed the office which hears NAFTA complaints, the Mexican government promised that workers would be able to choose union representation by secret ballot. "The Duro election strips away any idea that the NAFTA process can protect workers rights," says Martha Ojeda, director of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras. "The side agreement is bankrupt."

Events at Duro throw doubt on President Vicente Fox's promise that he intends to be more democratic than his predecessors. Labor activists on the border, in fact, see the denial of a secret ballot as consistent with the pro-business policies of his National Action Party (PAN). In states like Baja California, where the PAN has been in power for a decade, the party has fought efforts to organize independent unions. Strikes like the one at Han Young have been broken and court orders ignored.

The Duro vote also calls into question claims that treaties like NAFTA provide any mechanism for protecting workers rights. "Duro shows that for both the U.S. and Mexican governments, when the chips are down, their interest is in promoting investment," Alexander says. "Free trade clearly outweighs any commitments they make about labor rights. Institutions like NAFTA and the WTO will never operate in workers' interests. What's needed is an independent institution on an international level." ■



Appall-o-Meter

Farewell, Futrelle 9.9

Sadly, there will be no Appall-o-Meter this week. After years of chronicling bizarre court rulings, wacky despots and the exploits of Ted Nugent, we regret to report that David Futrelle is leaving the Appall-o-beat. We thank him for always making us laugh and wish him luck.

But fear not faithful readers, the future of the Appall-o-Meter is in good hands. The torch is being passed to Dave "Cat Scratch Fever" Mulcahey, who will take the controls in the next issue.



Borneo's Breakdown

A long history of oppression
fuels ethnic bloodshed

By G. Pascal Zachary

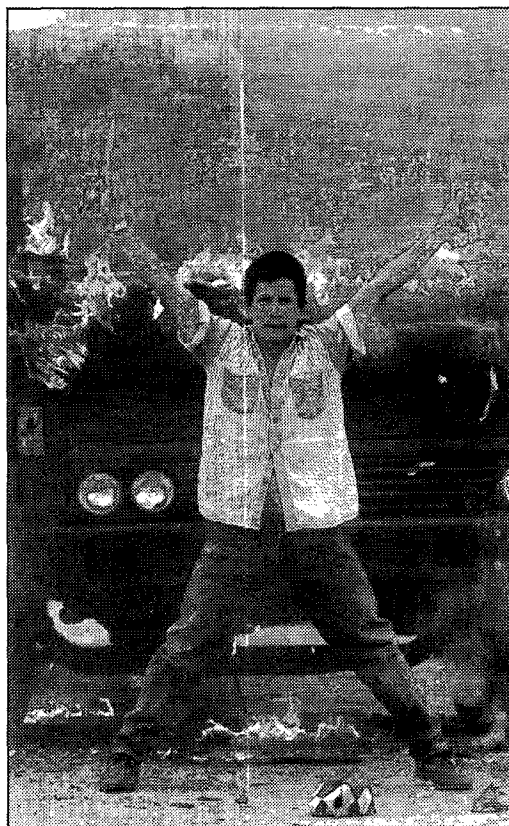
KUCHING, MALAYSIA—In February, Indonesia's Dayaks drew international attention after the gruesome killings of hundreds of Indonesian settlers, even decapitating some victims in an echo of a long abandoned traditional headhunting practice. The events cast a shadow over the indigenous people of Borneo, resurrecting the specter of primitive "savages" running amok.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Far from ruling Borneo, the largest island in Southeast Asia, Dayaks are an oppressed majority. The recent rampages on the Indonesian side of Borneo (the island is shared with Malaysia and, in the tiny northwest corner, the oil sheikdom Brunei) mirror two earlier violent outbursts, in 1997 and 1999. The violence failed then, and is failing now, to transform Dayak politics in Borneo, where indigenous people are fragmented, directionless and indeed apathetic about the prospects for change. "The only practical solution to the plight of the Dayak is a cross-border, pan-Dayak movement," says one former senior official in Malaysia, who requested anonymity. "But the governments of Malaysia and Indonesia are terrified of this and do everything they can to prevent it."

Indigenous people across the world find adapting to the reality of nation-states difficult. But in Borneo the problem of Dayak tribalism—dozens of groups, while falling under the Dayak rubric and sharing basic social and cultural practices, still speak different languages and express some unease with one another—is rendered more poignant by geographic considerations. Borneo holds 288,000 square miles of stunning rainforests, thriving rivers and unparalleled biodiversity. National borders, remnants of colonialism, don't begin to reflect the basic unity of the island.

Borneo's population barely reaches 15 million, making the island one of the

most sparsely peopled places in all of Asia. Even after decades of colonization—first by the Dutch and the British and later by the Malays and the Javanese—Dayak peoples still roughly count as a majority of the population. While Dayaks lack economic power and receive only token representation in government, they have proven adept at resisting the encroachments of outsiders. In Malaysia, the nomadic Penan group has fought loggers, raising awareness of the importance of forests to traditional



Violence has ravaged Indonesian Borneo.

peoples. Dayaks also have gained some leverage by the mere threat that they will withdraw their considerable support for the Malay ruling coalition.

History also sets apart the Dayaks in Malaysia, whose federal structure affords them greater autonomy than those across the border in Indonesia. Under a mid-'60s treaty, Britain's Borneo territories of Sabah and Sarawak were stitched together with its Malaya colony located hundreds of miles to the west. The result was Malaysia. As part of the deal, Dayaks in Sarawak and Sabah lost their claims to the huge oil and gas reserves, but retained the right to use their own languages in

schools. Moreover, a firm limit was placed on the ability of Malays from elsewhere in the country to move to Sarawak and Sabah, thus guaranteeing that indigenous people, while exploited, would not be overrun by settlers. In Indonesia, the Dayaks received no such guarantees. Outrages by immigrants from other islands in the Indonesian archipelago, such as logging of Dayak communal lands, were ignored by Indonesian government, fueling the Dayaks' rage.

The strong Dayak presence in Borneo makes it one of the most important places in the world for the preservation and evolution of indigenous people. Compared to the decimation over the centuries of native peoples of Australia and the Americas, the Dayak experience has been relatively good. Dayaks were neither enslaved nor exterminated by their British and Dutch colonizers. The remoteness of Borneo, where distant communities are still linked largely by rivers and basic amenities such as electricity are uncommon, also helped slow Dayak cultural decline. So today Dayak languages thrive. Only a few Dayak groupings, notably the inimitable Penan, who depend on pristine forests for their survival, face extinction. And while many Dayaks are poor, they are no poorer than many in Southeast Asia.

Perhaps because of their relatively stable situation, Dayaks have tended to accept domination of their island—and the exploitation of its vast timber, oil and gas resources—by central governments in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta. The latest reminder is the scheme in Malaysia to revive the mammoth Bakun Dam project. At a cost of more than \$2 billion, the dam has forced the relocation of 9,000 Dayaks and will flood a huge area.

Electricity, which was to be exported through undersea cables to western Malaysia, isn't even needed on Borneo because the Malaysian half of the island has sufficient power capacity. The Bakun project seemed dead when the Asian financial crisis in the late '90s caught Malaysia short of cash. Now

DARREN WHITESIDE/REUTERS

Malaysia wants to sell Bakun power to Kalimantan, the collection of Indonesian provinces on Borneo. Without such sales, the big dam project can't succeed economically.

Adding to the pressure on the Dayaks is the assault on their values by Christian missionaries. Perversely, Dayaks welcome conversion to Christianity because it eases pressure on them to convert to Islam, the dominant religion in Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia. But while some Dayaks practice a nominal Christianity, maintaining traditional beliefs, many others earnestly adopt the missionaries' disdain for their customs.

Dayaks rarely air their grievances openly. Malaysia has a draconian Internal Security Act, which allows for detention without charge, and in recent years Sarawak authorities have seized the passports of Dayak activists, limiting their contacts with Western sympathizers and putting them in their place. Dayak leaders, meanwhile, openly curry favor with the Malay elite, eagerly embracing co-optation.

In Indonesia, however, Dayaks are considerably poorer and lack the education and leadership to mount a coherent drive for greater autonomy. The possibilities for cross-border coordination is undermined by suspicion that a pan-Dayak movement would only play into the hands of Indonesian or Malaysian nationalists by leading one side to secede and join the other. Many groups, from the Aceh in Sumatra to the Papau in New Guinea, seek independence from Jakarta. Curiously the Dayaks—so far—do not. ■

Caught on Tape

Presidential scandal drives Ukraine into political chaos

By Fred Weir

MOSCOW—Europe's fourth largest country, Ukraine, is sliding into a potentially cataclysmic political crisis over allegations that President Leonid Kuchma is guilty of massive corruption, electoral fraud and conspiracy to commit murder.

The president's foes—an unusual coalition of Communists, democrats and right-wing nationalists—have held almost daily protest rallies over the past several months. On several occasions, crowds numbering more than 10,000 have surged through the streets of Kiev demanding Kuchma's resignation over tape recordings that purport to show him planning the murder of opposition journalist Georgiy Gongadze.

Kuchma has lashed out at the demonstrations as "psychological warfare" and "a direct threat to Ukraine's national security," and has warned that he is ready to mobilize the security forces to "defend constitutional order."

Police violence against protesters has escalated sharply in recent weeks, including a brutal raid on the opposition's downtown Kiev tent camp in early March, which resulted in many injuries and dozens of arrests.

Gongadze's headless corpse was found half-buried in a forest near Kiev in November. He had been an editor

of a crusading Internet newspaper, *Ukrainskaya Pravda*, which specializes in documenting corruption accusations against government officials.

In February, prosecutors verified the corpse as that of Gongadze and launched an official investigation into his murder. Kuchma, who won post-Soviet Ukraine's only free and open presidential election in 1994, has consistently and emphatically denied any involvement in the journalist's fate.

But the 300 hours of secret tape recordings, publicly released in late 2000 by parliamentary opposition leader Oleksandr Moroz, suggest otherwise. Former presidential bodyguard Mikola Melnychenko—who has since fled abroad—recorded the obscenity-peppered conversations, apparently by means of a taping device hidden under a sofa in Kuchma's office.

The Melnychenko tapes seem to contain enough dirt on Kuchma to launch a dozen impeachment trials. Among other explosive revelations, Kuchma is allegedly heard telling security officials that Gongadze should be made to "disappear," perhaps by having him kidnapped by "Chechen bandits."

In sections recorded during the president's re-election campaign in 1999, Kuchma orders aides to threaten local leaders and factory directors with arrest on corruption charges if they don't bring in enough pro-Kuchma votes. "We need to win by a comfortable margin," the voice says.

In another conversation, Kuchma is heard railing against a Ukrainian judge who was "too lenient" with a lawyer accused of spreading false information about the president. "You take this judge out and hang him by the balls," Kuchma allegedly shouts.

Kuchma has not denied that the voice on the tapes is his, and has confessed that he often uses "salty language" in private, but has repeatedly insisted that crucial sections of the recordings were "doctored" by his enemies. Several others whose voices are heard on the tapes, including parliamentarians and officials, have verified their participation in those conversations.

However, a two-month examination of the recordings by the International Press Institute in Vienna ended inconclusively in early March with experts

Another Step Toward Abolition

Five Illinois legislators introduced a bill in late February to abolish the death penalty. The action arrives a year after Gov. George Ryan imposed a moratorium on executions and established a special committee to examine the problems in the state criminal justice system.

The bill would commute all death penalty sentences to life in prison without parole. However, without the committee's recommendation, it is unlikely the bill will reach the House floor for the spring session.

A February Gallup poll indicated sup-

port for the death penalty is at its lowest level since 1981: Only 66 percent of Americans now favor it. According to Gallup, the percentage drops to 54 percent when life imprisonment with no parole is given as the alternative.

Illinois reinstated capital punishment in 1977. Since that time, 12 men have been executed by lethal injection and 13 have been exonerated. Prosecutors in Illinois continue to seek death penalty convictions, despite the moratorium, and 10 men have been sentenced to death since Ryan halted executions.

Esra Khalil



SERGEI SUPINSKY/AFP

On March 9, 10,000 people took to the streets of Kiev demanding Kuchma's resignation.

unable to determine if the digitally recorded tapes had been altered.

Ukraine largely has disappeared from the world's radar screens since it gained its independence from the USSR a decade ago. Fearful of pushing Kiev into Russia's embrace, the West has tended to downplay the growing signs that Ukraine's post-Soviet democracy is slipping off the rails.

Critics warn that Kuchma, a former Soviet rocket factory director with strong ties to Moscow, is maneuvering to curb the powers of Ukraine's parliament and set up an autocratic "presidential republic," following the examples of Boris Yeltsin's violent crushing of his opposition legislature in Russia in 1993.

The crisis has given new life to Ukraine's parliamentary opposition, which has warned it will begin impeachment proceedings if prosecutors file criminal charges against the president. However, the crisis ultimately may be resolved in the streets. Although the protests against Kuchma have yet to attract mass public participation, most of the country's usually fractious opposition leaders appear to have thrown in their lot with the burgeoning "Ukraine Without Kuchma" movement, including Yulia Tymoshenko, a liberal economist and wealthy business tycoon

whom Kuchma fired from her post as deputy prime minister in January, and later had arrested on charges of embezzlement and fraud. Tymoshenko has become the chief poster girl of the anti-Kuchma opposition and, some say, its main political force. From her cell in Kiev's Lukyanivka prison, "Iron Yulia" continues to issue a stream of statements and directives to her followers.

However, as Roman Manekin, of the Official Institute of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Moscow says: "The struggle between Kuchma and his opponents is actually between two wings of the elite, each trying to scapegoat the other for everything that has gone wrong."

In the meantime, the embattled Kuchma has signed a raft of economic and security agreements with Russia, and has ended all talk of Ukraine's possible application to join NATO. In return, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Ukraine in mid-February and emphasized that Moscow will conduct business-as-usual with Kuchma. "We did not discuss politics," Putin remarked with a telltale grin.

But opinion appears divided over Kuchma's chances of weathering the storm. "The final showdown will probably come in the spring," Manekin says. "Kuchma still firmly controls the state apparatus, but all polls show public opinion moving decisively against him." ■

Credit Card Congress

Washington's bankruptcy reform will harm the poor

By Sam Nelson

Congress recently gave a bipartisan nod to a bill that would dramatically overhaul the current bankruptcy code, giving banks and credit card companies even greater power over debt-burdened Americans.

The bill, approved by the Senate on March 15, would reroute many who currently file under Chapter 7 bankruptcy, which dissolves most unsecured debt, such as credit cards, into Chapter 13. These debtors would instead be subjected to a means test to determine how much they could afford to pay back to creditors.

Consumer advocates say the bill unfairly deprives many heavily indebted, low-income Americans of their only protection against financial ruin, and fails to hold creditors accountable for the high interest rates and predatory lending practices that force consumers into bankruptcy in the first place. What's more, they argue, the new code would make filing so complicated that it would require the help of an attorney, making bankruptcy unaffordable for those most in need of protection.

The bill's supporters contend that it targets only wealthier debtors who can afford to pay back what they owe. But Travis Plunkett, legislative counsel for the Consumer Federation of America, says this argument is "a complete lie." Anyone who has the patience to study the bill's several thousand pages, he says, understands that "even the worst off—those with incomes under \$25,000 and debt levels approaching that figure—will have a much harder time filing for bankruptcy."

In fact, the bill's curious consumer protection component seems to protect only the wealthy. This includes a provision that would wipe out debt owed by a handful of wealthy American investors to Lloyd's of London. And Republicans have made clear their displeasure with a Democratic proposal to cap the so-called "homestead exemption," which has allowed the wealthy to protect large estates from seizure.

The bill also includes a requirement that bankruptcy filers enter credit management programs. While seemingly in the interest of debtors, many view this stipulation as yet another gift to credit card issuers, who routinely raise interest rates for those hoping to pay off their credit card debt in such programs.

Opponents in the Senate, led by Minnesota Democrat Paul Wellstone, have introduced several amendments that would soften the bill's impact on middle- and low-income debtors. But several of these amendments have already been voted down, including a measure that would have protected those with high medical expenses. Wellstone is not optimistic, conceding that "the big guys will probably win."

The banking and credit card lobbies are among the most powerful and well-funded in Washington, with unrivaled access to lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, and the influence to see legislation passed that is virtually tailor-made to their interests. Last year, for example, Congress passed the Financial Services Modernization Act, which was backed by an historic \$300 million in lobbying and campaign contributions, and championed by the banking industry's most illustrious and

well-connected spokesman, former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin. Rubin is now co-chairman of the financial services conglomerate Citigroup, which stood to benefit most from the law that allows banks, insurance companies and brokerage houses to operate under the same roof.

The same interests have mobilized to persuade legislators of the urgency of bankruptcy reform. In the final days of the Senate debate, says Wellstone spokesman Jim Ferrel, the consumer credit lobbyists on Capitol Hill were "as thick as fleas."

The Center for Responsive Politics reports that the financial services industry spent an estimated \$50 million on lobbying and campaign contributions in the last election cycle. Lance Weaver, the senior vice-chairman of MBNA America Bank, one of the country's biggest credit card lenders and the Bush campaign's top corporate donor, was rewarded with a spot on the presidential transition team.

The past two decades have seen the systematic dismantling of many of the safeguards put in place in the wake of the Great Depression to protect consumers from lenders' lust for profits. This deregulatory fervor has led to the phasing out of interest rate ceilings and the

state-by-state repeal of usury laws, paving the way for high-interest credit cards that have become the profitable cornerstone of commercial banking in the United States. Last year the consumer credit industry raked in a record \$3.4 billion in profits—a 30 percent increase from the year before.

A recent FDIC study shows that the dramatic rise in bankruptcy rates—up 400 percent in 25 years—is directly related to banking deregulation and the proliferation of high-interest credit cards. To ensure high returns, credit card issuers have devised sophisticated marketing schemes to ensnare financially vulnerable users who will maintain high balances, struggle to make minimum monthly payments and pay hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars in interest. Their tactics include the familiar mailing of pre-approved, high interest rate credit cards by the millions to college students, the working poor and the unemployed.

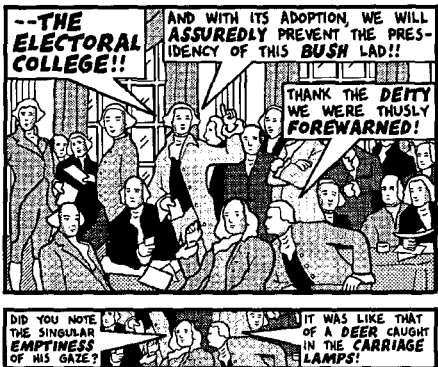
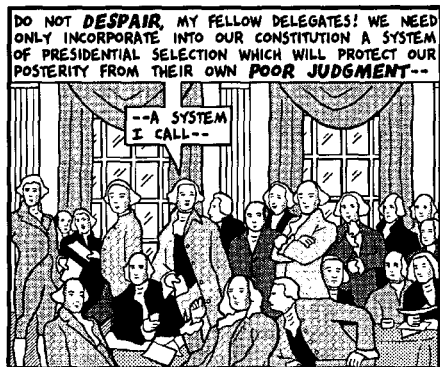
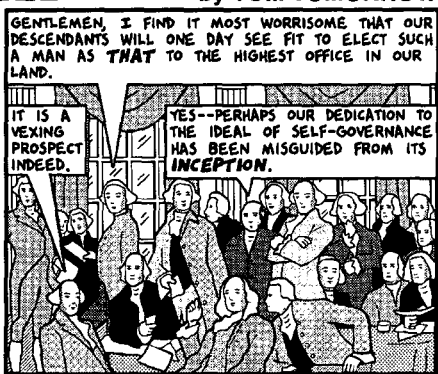
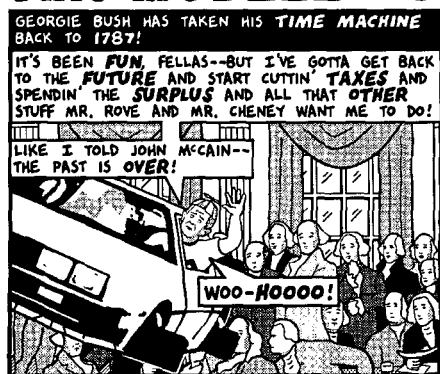
"The financial services industry is the poster child for corporate irresponsibility," says David Butler of the Consumer's Union. Yet in their crusade for bankruptcy reform, creditors have managed to shift the blame onto the exploited consumer, arguing that the bill will rein in the hedonistic consumption and financial imprudence of those who see bankruptcy as an easy way to cancel their debts. This image has been milked by champions of the bill in Congress, with Iowa Republican Sen. Charles Grassley moralizing that it will "usher in a new era of personal responsibility."

The actual data on bankruptcy in America tells a different story. A team of social scientists and legal experts working on the Consumer Bankruptcy Project have examined thousands of recent bankruptcy cases and found that only a small fraction actually involve "irresponsible over-consumption." The leading causes of bankruptcy, they determined, are job loss, medical debt and divorce. Harvard Law Professor Elizabeth Warren, who co-directed the study, says the bankruptcy bill "targets working families who are victims of circumstance and lets creditors squeeze them harder."

The legislation is designed by and for bankers, Warren says. "They are trying to make bankruptcy unaffordable. This would not pass in a truly representative democracy." ■

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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Counted Out

Bush administration makes 3.3 million people disappear

By Ted Kline

Remember the last time the Republican Party put on a magic show? On December 12, conservative members of the Supreme Court made 69,000 ballots disappear in Florida. But that was amateur night compared to the wizardry of Commerce Secretary Don Evans. At a March press conference witnessed by dozens of reporters, Evans caused 3.3 million Americans to vanish without a trace.

How'd he do it? Evans refused to allow the Census Bureau to use the scientific process of sampling, which would have adjusted the population figures to correct for undercounts in minority and immigrant neighborhoods.

Big cities like Los Angeles desperately want to use sampled figures to plan public services. A decade ago, the Census Bureau badly shortchanged L.A., missing nearly 5 percent of the city's residents. The school district used the inaccurate figures to decide how many new schools it needed. In the early '90s, a huge surge of 5-year-olds—far more than the Census had predicted—started registering for kindergarten. There weren't nearly enough classrooms to hold them all.

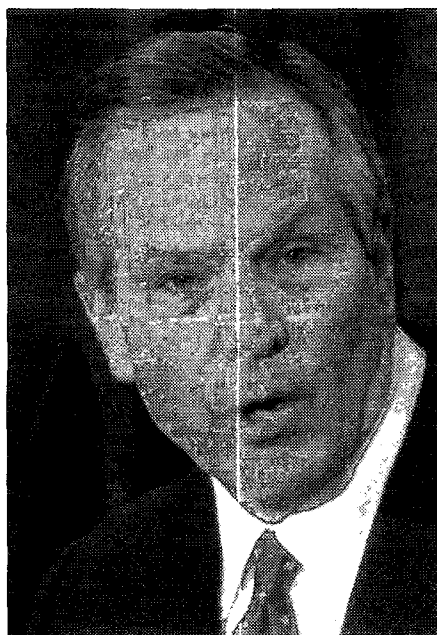
Los Angeles also uses census figures to plan bus lines, site police stations, build sewers and distribute money for Head Start programs. "Everything we do in government is based on this," says Jessica Hines, an assistant city attorney. "If you don't have good data, it's very hard to allocate money for parks."

Evans' sleight-of-hand isn't meant to force kindergarteners into overcrowded classrooms. He's really trying to trick California's Democratic legislature, which could use sampled figures to draw new districts for the state's 53 congressional seats. That would increase representation in black and Hispanic areas, threatening the Republican majority in Congress. Nationwide, the undercount is equivalent to five congressional seats—enough to even the

score between Democrats and the GOP in the House.

At a March 6 press conference, Evans explained that there wasn't time for the Census Bureau to determine whether sampling was more accurate than a head count. The bureau had to meet an April 1 deadline for delivering redistricting information to the states. Nonetheless, he assured the country that it was getting "the most accurate census ever."

Someone was watching the secretary's other hand, though. The very same day, Everett Erlich, a member of the bi-partisan U.S. Census Monitoring Board, shouted out Evans' secret. "We are concerned that,



Commerce Secretary Don Evans was the Bush campaign's fundraising wizard.

pressed for time, the Bureau did not do an adequate analysis of this question," Ehrlich wrote. He concluded that "there is a preponderance of evidence that shows that the sample-based adjustment was correct."

If the bureau sticks with its head count, Los Angeles alone stands to lose \$37 million a year. "There is likely to be more of an undercount in areas like Los Angeles because we have so many immigrants," says Jeffrey Beckerman, a demographer in the city's planning department.

Evans has not yet decided whether the bureau will use sampled figures to divvy up federal funding. Those 3.3 million

people need to stay behind the curtain at least until redistricting is finished. Then the secretary will decide whether to bring them back onstage. "The Census Bureau would have to come to me and say to me that the adjusted data is more accurate than the unadjusted data," Evans says.

Those studies will take months, maybe years. Los Angeles can't wait that long. Once better-counted communities see their share of federal aid, they're going to fight any attempt to change the numbers. So L.A. and several other big cities are suing to force the release of sampled figures. "We need to get the data out in the next few weeks," Hines says.

America's neediest citizens will lose the most as a result of Evans' magic show. While the Census Bureau estimates that national undercount rate was 1.1 percent, they missed 2.2 percent of blacks and 2.8 percent of Hispanics. Some college students and families with second homes were actually counted twice, errors that sampling would correct.

The incomplete census won't just hurt the urban poor. Cindy Taapken, a health educator and census taker from Morgantown, West Virginia, is certain that people were not counted in her rural county. "I worked as a follow-up enumerator, counting people who were not counted via return forms," Taapken says. "We weren't even able to ask some people if they wanted to be counted."

Evans' decision to suppress the sampled figures caused an uproar among congressional Democrats. They were already angry at him for stripping census professionals of the final authority to decide the sampling issue. When Bush addressed Congress in February, Democrats left five seats empty in protest.

The day the 3.3 million disappeared, Rep. Carolyn Maloney of New York accused Evans of refusing to allow enough time for an accurate count—and noted that his boss won the presidential election the same way. "Why won't Secretary Evans go the extra mile to ensure that everyone is counted?" Maloney asked. "I guess it is just like Florida, again. The clock has run out on counting people."

Where's a magician like David Copperfield when we need him? Wiping out millions was beyond his power, but once he made an elephant vanish. ■

Ex-Factor

Web designer Zack Exley makes some big enemies

By Geeta Kharkar

Zack Exley has a knack for attracting attention. His parody Web sites have created such a stir that one target—George W. Bush—went so far as to proclaim: “There ought to be limits to freedom.” But his latest target, CNN, is fighting back with more than just indignation. They are suing Exley for copyright infringement over his parody of their financial news site, CNNfn.com.

Exley’s site, CNNdn, is modeled after CNNfn, except that it is set in the year 2002 and depicts a world where the dot-com economy has come to a crashing halt. The site has mock news articles reporting that billionaire investor Warren Buffet poured in money to turn dying dot-coms eBay, Yahoo! and Google into nonprofit organizations. “It was just an idea I had on a Sunday afternoon,” says Exley, a 31-year-old Boston computer consultant.

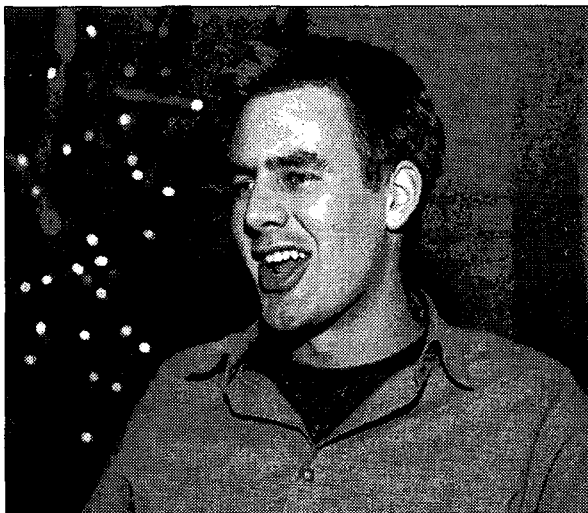
The site was launched on December 12. A month later a letter from a CNN lawyer informed him that they were suing for violation of trademark laws. Exley wrote back to the law firm insisting that his site caused no harm to CNN, and then posted the correspondence on the site.

Exley’s case has been taken on pro bono by Stanford Law School’s Center for Internet and Society, which was created to defend free speech on the Internet.

Exley says that prior to the lawsuit, traffic on the site was minimal, but when he posted the letter from the lawyers, it started to pick up again. As the story gained media attention, traffic at the site soared—peaking at 100,000 hits a day. However, in late January, CNN’s parent company, AOL Time Warner, won a temporary restraining order on the site, forcing Exley to pull it off the Web.

Exley insists that his “Onion-style” parody of CNN is a valid form of satire. He has moved the Web site to a new location (whosealphabet.com), and posts continual updates on the situation—including a “comparative analysis” of what he and AOL Time Warner each have to gain and lose by the lawsuit. According to his analysis, one of his “gains” from the lawsuit is “something to talk about at parties for the next couple of months. (‘Why yes, I am being sued by CNN.’) Once they told me to take down the site or they’d sue,” Exley laughs, “I knew it was going to be fun.”

Raised in Hartford, Connecticut, Exley took an interest in computers as early as junior high, but quit because he didn’t want to “become a computer geek.” After graduating from the University of Massachusetts, he began working as a union organizer for the United Autoworkers and the AFL-CIO.



“Obviously this is a garbageman.”

Exley left union organizing at age 29 and began working as a full-time computer programmer—an occupation he found less than satisfying. “IT workers work 45 minutes a day,” Exley says. “I had a lot of time on my hands.”

The presidential election was still in its earliest stages, and he began following stories about George W. Bush, some of which painted him as an unintelligent businessman who’d had a cocaine problem. “I was blown away by the hypocrisy of it all,” Exley says, “considering Bush’s strict drug laws.”

Exley decided to check out the official Bush Web site, and discovered that the domain GWBush.com was unreserved. He snatched it up in December 1998. The site closely resembles the official Bush campaign Web site, but with a dark twist. An article supposedly penned by Bush defends his tax cut plan by comparing it to Mao’s “Great Leap Forward” and Stalin’s Soviet economic plan. The site also features doctored photos of Bush smoking a joint and snorting cocaine, many of which were submitted by fans.

Ironically, Exley’s parody Web site gained notoriety only after the candidate’s legal team tried to have it pulled from the Internet, and Bush publicly remarked, “There’s a lot of garbage in politics, and obviously this is a garbageman.”

Another Exley creation to garner a lot of attention was his Countercoup.org. Posted a month before the presidential election, it cited a date and time to protest, should Bush win the electoral college but not the popular vote. Within days after the election, people had bombarded the site, using it as a posting board to set up protests in 50 major cities, which drew nearly 10,000 people. Inspired by the events, Exley is now trying to create Internet tools to help organizers. “It showed me that we’re not tapping the potential of the Web,” he says.

Anti-Bush bumper-sticker sales allow him to “eke out” a living while he awaits the outcome of the CNN case. Among other things, he is writing a book about union organizing, and trying to create a PAC that will sponsor humorous but hard-hitting anti-Bush ads in the next presidential election.

Some see Exley’s antics as a plea for attention, but he insists that his sites are just an example of how the left can utilize the Web to galvanize change. “If you have something interesting to put out there, then the Internet drops the physical barriers,” he says. “Anyone can publish a Web site, so what’s our excuse?”

Even if his Web sites don’t bring down corporate media or overturn the next election, Exley says that his 15 minutes of fame have been an interesting experience. “Hey,” he says, “it broke up the monotony of computer programming.” ■

DECLAN MCCULLAGH/MCCULLAGH.ORG

A Shock to the Census

The biggest shock to emerge so far from preliminary results of the 2000 Census has been the enormous growth in the nation's Hispanic population. The number of Latinos residing in the 50 states jumped by nearly 60 percent, from 22.4 million in 1990 to 35.3 million last year.

For the first time in U.S. history, the Hispanic-origin population drew virtually even with the black population, which totaled 36.4 million last year. And that's without counting the 3.8 million residents of Puerto Rico, all of whom are U.S. citizens. Until now most demographers had not expected mainland Hispanics to overtake African-Americans as the country's biggest minority group until 2005, but that milestone will be passed this year.

Even without the statistical sampling adjustment that Democrats had sought, the Census Bureau's counters discovered 2.6 million more Hispanics living in the country than its statisticians had projected. This is a huge number of people to have lost count of in the first place. While the bureau concedes its 1990 census was so poorly done that it failed to count some 6 million people, this time around it apparently did a better job.

As the magnitude of this demographic transformation begins to sink in, every institution of American society will have to rethink its policies and priorities, every political organization will have to refashion its platform and strategies. This is as true for conservative Republicans as it is for radical Marxists.

Consider some details of this amazing transformation since 1990:

- In Nevada, where overall the population grew by roughly 60 percent, the number of Hispanics skyrocketed by 200 percent—from 131,000 to 394,000—and they now comprise almost 20 percent of the state's population.
- In Texas, the second most populous state, whites increased by 13.4 percent, blacks by 14 percent and Hispanics by 45 percent. There are now 6.7 million Latinos in Texas, nearly one-third of the state's population.

- In Illinois, Hispanics grew by 69 percent, to 1.5 million, the black population grew 10.9 percent, and the white population showed a negligible increase. Latinos now make up 12 percent of the state's population and a quarter of the city of Chicago.



In our biggest cities, population growth is being fed by the increasing number of Hispanic and Asian residents, yet the national debate around race and ethnicity, around education and social policies, remains disproportionately focused on relations between white and black Americans. Too many political leaders, even on the left, are still staring at the rear-view mirror, looking back at what the country was, not at what it is becoming. Look, for example, at the resources and time spent by American radicals on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict compared to the ongoing popular battles in Mexico.

The Mexican-American population represents the heart of the Latino migration story. Two-thirds of all Hispanics in the country are of Mexican origin, and Mexicans are the second-largest immigrant group in U.S. history, at least since 1820 when the federal government started keeping immigration records. Whether Mexican immigration continues to surpass all others depends largely on what happens south of the Rio Grande.

Mexico is the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world. It has 95 million residents, a high birth rate and desperate poverty. A disturbing portion of its national wealth flows into the pockets of Wall Street shareholders. So much has been siphoned off in recent

years that the Mexican economy finds it increasingly difficult to feed and clothe its population.

If these conditions don't change, Mexico will remain an inexhaustible source of migrants to the United States, and the economic integration unleashed by NAFTA will only accelerate the process. Thus Mexico's future is far more critical to that of the American people, and to American labor in particular, than is Israel's or Palestine's or Ireland's. But you wouldn't sense that by looking at regular news coverage of international affairs in either the corporate or alternative press.

Or consider the growing right-wing assault on bilingual education in our public schools. It has been mounting for several years, despite the reality that our nation is becoming increasingly bilingual. Yet in virtually every state and city where the fight has erupted, Hispanic activists, educators and parents have found themselves almost alone in waging the fight, while radical and progressive whites and blacks have hardly paid attention.

The benign neglect of the left toward this growing sector of our nation must be confronted. Only organized labor has made any real attempt to change institutional policies and methods in

Too many political leaders are looking back at what the country was, not at what it is becoming.

dealing with Hispanics. The trade union movement under John Sweeney was the first to recognize that it was likely to wither away unless it addressed the needs of low-skilled and unorganized Latino workers and welcomed them into its leadership ranks. But other progressive movements and institutions are still resisting substantive change.

Hopefully, the new census figures will rouse the left from daydreaming about the past, because you can bet the right-wing is already digesting them—and will soon be shifting its rhetoric and strategies to find ways to stay in power in 21st-century America. ■

Let's Get Fiscal

Just before he assumed office in January 1993, Bill Clinton proposed a \$31 billion increase in federal spending to stimulate a sluggish economy. In a matter of days, he halved it, then dropped it altogether in the face of opposition from Republicans, conservative Democrats, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and his own economic advisers. Fiscal discipline and deficit reduction became the order of the day.

It's eight years later, and gone from Democratic Party discourse is any notion of increasing government spending to promote economic growth, or even cutting taxes—at least until President George W. Bush began pushing neo-Reagan tax cuts upon taking office.

"Almost all economists now agree," declares liberal economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman, "that monetary policy, not fiscal policy, is the tool of choice for fighting recessions." The government, Krugman advises, should be "out of the business of short-term economic management." Robert Litan of the Brookings Institution puts it this way: "Fiscal policy as a tool of macro-economic policy is dead. The thinking now is that any fine-tuning should be left to the Fed"—reducing interest rates when the economy is weakening, increasing them if it overheats.

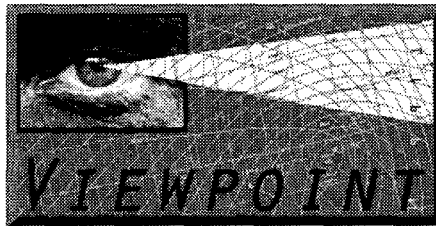
But the track record of such monetary policy is notoriously bad. The Fed cut interest rates 18 times from 1989 to 1992, for example, but not until 1996 did the economy grow as fast as it typically does when recovering from the trough of a recession. Not to worry, however. The conservative New Democrats do have a "fiscal policy": running federal budget surpluses every year and using the proceeds to pay down the national debt.

Few liberal economists would go as far as Al Gore did in February 2000, when he said that if the economy ever slowed down enough to turn budget surpluses into deficits, he would still pursue debt reduction by cutting spending, "just as a corporation has to cut expenses if revenues fall off."

But in December, Krugman criticized Dick Cheney's call for a tax cut to

counter a looming economic slowdown as a "bad idea." Why? Not because Cheney's remarks were crassly opportunistic, but because they were "those of a vulgar Keynesian."

The emasculation of Keynesian fiscal policy is a bipartisan accomplishment.



Differences between Democrats and Republicans are now limited to a reactionary debate between debt cutters and tax cutters—with the Democrats lock-boxing themselves into strangulation of federal spending on everything except the military.

It's distressing that the "best and the brightest" cannot even imagine legislation that would give the president more flexibility over the amounts and timing of some kinds of spending during economic downturns, or give wage-earners immediate tax rebates of, say, \$250 to \$500 per household. Or how about cuts in tax withholdings concentrated at the lower end of the income scale?

The prime target here would be cuts in Social Security payroll taxes (FICA), with no loss of future benefits. FICA reductions would also bring income redistribution, since this tax hits lower-income workers harder (its flat 6.2 percent rate is levied on only the first \$80,400 of earned income, not beyond). Aren't these issues that need to be placed on the public agenda, even though—or precisely because—they are unthinkable for the time being?

Even more remarkably, New Democrats ignore a whole set of fiscal policy tools—"automatic stabilizers"—that produce the desired countercyclical effects on their own (with no legislation or any other discretionary action needed) by pumping more spending into the

economy during a recession and doing the reverse as the economy expands toward full employment and a possible upturn in inflation.

The key automatic stabilizers are graduated-rate (progressive) income taxes, unemployment compensation, welfare payments and food stamps. Starting in 1981, three presidential administrations have gutted them. The only exception was Clinton's 1993 tax increase, which restored a small degree of progressivity to federal income taxes; but it was matched by "ending welfare as we know it." Rebuilding the stabilizers urgently needs to be addressed. So does renewed government spending on education, medical care and other public investments far more valuable than private spending on SUVs and designer boutiques.

Even with the noblest intentions on the part of its practitioners (a charitable assumption), monetary policy remains the private preserve of the financial elite and undemocratic in its formulation and execution—as wonderfully exemplified by the Delphic pronouncements of Alan Greenspan.

Fiscal policy is by its nature different.

Nearly every fight for social reform has been waged on the fiscal battlefield.

Unlike monetary policy, it has potential for redistributing income from rich toward poor. And its tools—spending and taxing—make all of us direct participants. Nearly every fight for social and economic reform has been waged, and sometimes won, on the fiscal battlefield. One looks back almost with incredulity on the spectacle of the past two decades—that so much of what was gained since the '30s has been snatched away by the phalanxes of the right, whose triumphs were ratified by a New Democrat in the White House during the '90s. It's high time to start waging fiscal war again. ■

Richard B. Du Boff is professor emeritus of economics at Bryn Mawr College.

Greed Fuels Energy Crisis

Deregulation of the energy industry was supposed to bring lower prices through the invisible hand of the free market. It didn't. Ask any electricity consumer in California, natural gas consumer in the Midwest or home heating oil consumer in the Northeast. Energy prices have accelerated, energy company profits have skyrocketed and consumers are at the mercy of corporations.

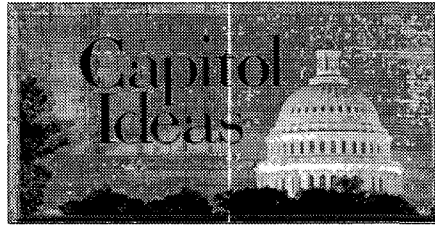
Why? Deregulation freed energy companies to manipulate energy supplies in order to raise the price. Using their "market power" they withheld energy from the market, creating artificial shortages. These manufactured shortages have caused consumer prices to rise and corporate profits to balloon. As *Public Utilities Fortnightly* observed, "The bottom line [in California] is straightforward. ... Generators did not generate. Peakers did not peak. Emergencies appeared to lack solid justification. All of the evidence is consistent with a major, sustained exercise of market power."

In fact, corporations have manipulated the energy supply fully intending to cause blackouts, and thereby pressure state legislators and extort more taxpayer dollars for the industry. An explosive memorandum from Credit Suisse First Boston to its clients reveals that the blackouts were "intended to soften up the Legislature and the voters to the need for rate increases."

The blackouts were a significant factor in leading the California state government to approve \$400 million in additional spending. "The memo confirms the suspicion that the blackouts were nothing more than blackmail by the energy industry, which brought California to its knees so that state officials would panic and open up the public treasury," says Harvey Rosenfield, president of the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights.

Big profits are to be made in rigging the energy market. Public Citizen reports that newly formed deregulated energy companies selling in the California market have reaped a formidable growth in profits. The Williams

Companies earned 276 percent more in profits last year than the year before; Calpine Corporation earned 240 percent more; and Dynegy earned 210 percent more. Haven't heard of any of these companies? That's because they are unregulated affiliates of existing



power companies and new independent power producers.

In the natural gas market, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has since the early '90s deregulated the interstate pipeline industry creating natural gas marketers, who act as middle men in the transactions of bulk natural gas purchases and pipeline shipments capacity.

For example, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), the state regulator charged with protecting consumers, has filed a complaint with the FERC that seeks to void a natural gas transmission contract that permits one company to

dominate the transmission of natural gas into California. The FERC had determined competition exists despite there being only a single pipeline into Southern California, allowing this company to charge excessive transmission rates. The CPUC has estimated that these unjust and unreasonable rates will cost California natural gas and electricity consumers more than \$100 million.

The home heating oil market is completely unregulated. The industry has allowed storage inventory levels of heating oil to drop steadily over the past few years. Much like the natural gas market, the lower inventory levels have allowed the industry to raise prices with the excuse that supplies are low.

The consequences of energy deregulation have even shaken the faith of the "father of deregulation," Alfred E. Kahn, who as head of the Civil Aeronautics Board under President Carter authored deregulation in the airline industry. "I am worried about the uniqueness of electricity markets," Kahn told the *New York Times*. "Though free markets do a better job managing rail, phone and airline prices, they have yet to match regulators' ability to juggle the complexities of electricity."

In Washington, the issue is shaping up as a fight between dim and dimmer. The oil barons are proposing opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the coastline of the continental United States, and even the Great Lakes to drilling, while the nuclear power industry is looking for more government handouts to sustain their dangerous and polluting industry.

The 50-plus members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus maintain that deregulation of the energy industry has proved disastrous. We call upon the FERC to intervene to

Corporations have manipulated the energy supply to extort more taxpayer dollars from legislators.

stop predatory pricing practices by deregulated energy wholesalers. We propose requiring energy wholesalers to justify their costs to the FERC, which would then set a reasonable rate of return on their investment. Consumers would receive refunds for overcharges, retroactive to 2000. Our bill, the Consumer Energy Rate Relief Act of 2001, will reform the past error of deregulating the energy industry and return refunds to consumers.

Deregulation has failed to deliver lower energy prices. It's time for government to step in to protect consumers. ■

Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich (D-Ohio) is chairman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

FTAA, Eh?

A bigger, badder trade deal

By David Moberg

During his first months in the White House, George W. Bush has already tilted politics against worker safety and for tax giveaways to the rich, but on one front—trade and global economic agreements—there has been remarkable continuity from the Clinton era, just as Clinton extended the agenda of the first Bush regime. However, the younger Bush inherits a public skepticism about corporate globalization that has deepened since his father was in office.

Despite major losses on NAFTA, creation of the World Trade Organization, and trade relations with China during the Clinton years, the opposition movement—based on unions and environmental groups—has grown enough in breadth and militancy to win some battles and regularly rattle the elite corporate chiefs and global trade and finance officials. Most notably, opponents disrupted the Seattle WTO meeting and contributed to derailing a Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) among the rich countries. They also blocked renewal of the president's "fast track" trade authority, which would force Congress to vote yea or nay on trade agreements without amendments or extensive debate.

In broad terms, the battles in the near term will follow the same lines as over the past decade. Fast track—repackaged as "presidential trade promotion authority"—will again be the major fight in Congress this year, but the biggest street fight—in Quebec City and dozens of U.S. cities in late April—will be over the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), a proposed extension of an even more pro-corporate NAFTA to the Western Hemisphere. In each case, the crux of the conflict will be whether new global economic agreements will provide meaningful protection for the environment and labor rights.

Yet just as popular pressure is forcing government leaders to take labor and environmental issues more seriously, those movements are looking beyond securing such safeguards. Most global economic agreements, like the nascent FTAA, are now less about trade and tariffs or other barriers and more about investment, property rights, privatization, deregulation and greater power for corporations at the expense of governments. The critics of globalization still have a long way to go to secure labor rights and environmental responsibility as part of all global economic arrangements. Yet at the same time, they are broadening their demands to include greater citizen control over corporations, new models of development (including elimination of debt from most poor countries) and new financial regulation to stabilize the global economy.

The more sophisticated corporate globalizers are hoping that they can make some minor concessions to defuse this growing popular movement. Recognizing that the demand for labor and environmental safeguards isn't going away, the Business Roundtable and the Emergency Committee for American Trade—representing the biggest multinational corporations, like Caterpillar, Boeing and American International Group—have asked the Bush administration to make labor and environmental standards part of future trade talks.

Their credibility as defenders of worker rights is weak. In 1978 the Business Roundtable was the key group that killed labor law reform, which would have made it easier for workers to exercise their internationally guaranteed right to organize, and it has been a major promoter of deregulation of the global economy. But their initiative is a tribute to the strength of the popular movements and a sign of how badly big business wants more global deals. It also creates another



split within conservative, pro-business ranks, not unlike when some nationalist Republicans voted with the left-leaning Democrats on trade issues in recent years. Other business groups, like the Chamber of Commerce, and key conservatives in Congress, like House Majority Leader Dick Armey, oppose any reference to labor or the environment in trade deals. The first indications from Bush's trade representative, Robert Zoellick, suggest hostility to such provisions despite talk of flexibility.

But the Business Roundtable's shift also poses a challenge to the opponents of globalization. It's clear that the business groups want any labor and environmental provisions to be as weak as possible, providing political cover without real results. They want to avoid binding obligations or tough enforcement (some might accept monetary fines as penalties for labor and environmental violations, but not the kind of trade sanctions reserved for protecting corporate interests). Yet increasingly labor advocates and environmentalists want stronger measures that go beyond governments pressuring each other to enforce their own laws. They want agreements that would enable workers and citizen groups, not just governments, to initiate actions and that would apply sanctions and penalties against individual corporate violators as well as governments.

How far will critics compromise with this more accommodating wing of big business in order to strike a deal? At the end of the NAFTA debate, the major environmental groups split, with several of the moderate organizations endorsing

NAFTA because of the side agreements on labor and the environment that Clinton had negotiated. Their disappointment with those side agreements helped to consolidate later opposition to fast track.

A key test may come in a vote on the bilateral trade agreement with Jordan negotiated at the close of the Clinton administration. For the first time, labor and environmental protections—with provisions for enforcement—are included in the text of a trade agreement. Moreover, the Clinton administration invited the AFL-CIO to join discussions of the language during the negotiations. While U.S. labor participants did not get everything they wanted, they concluded (along with their Jordanian counterparts) that the terms were acceptable. However, Jordan is a special case: A very small country, it trades little with the United States; its new labor laws are quite progressive; and there's a foreign policy interest in strengthening the Jordanian economy to foster peace in the Middle East.

Still, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch criticized the Jordanian agreement as a model for future deals because the language is loose (for example, calling on the parties to "strive to ensure" that they don't relax their domestic environmental or labor laws for economic gain) and that the obligations and enforcement mechanisms are far weaker than for business interests (such as intellectual property rights).

Some Democrats are pressing Bush to submit the Jordanian agreement promptly, testing the administration's willingness to accept the labor and environmental language, but Iowa Republican Sen. Charles Grassley has suggested lumping fast track authority together with the Jordanian deal and a Vietnamese bilateral agreement (which does not include labor or environmental protections) as well as potential bilateral agreements with Singapore and Chile.

Although the Senate seems likely to remain a safe haven for trade deals, the House is up for grabs, with crucial votes likely to be swung by campaign contributors, friction between the two political parties, or foreign policy interests in voting for a package that includes trade deals with Vietnam or Jordan. Without Clinton in the White House, Democrats may be more willing to oppose Bush and fight for a new model of trade agreements, but anti-globalist right-wing Republicans might also feel party pressure to back Bush. In any case, labor, environmental and other progressive critics of corporate globalization are already planning grassroots pressure campaigns on legislators from both parties.

At the end of her term, Clinton trade representative Charlene Barshefsky expressed skepticism about the need for fast track authority. Indeed, the Clinton administration negotiated hundreds of trade agreements without fast track, which has been used only five times since it was first granted to President Nixon. But fast track has both symbolic and practical value for the administration, in suggesting to trading partners that it can deliver approval of any terms negotiated. Bush had wanted fast track—or at least progress toward it—before the Summit of the Americas in Quebec on April 20 as part of his campaign to accelerate negotiation of the FTA.

Although Quebec largely will be a formal display by hemispheric heads of state (with the substantive ministerial negotiations occurring earlier in April in



Argentina), the Bush administration has made the FTAA a top priority and would like to accelerate negotiations to conclude a deal in two years rather than the scheduled four. American corporations are anxious to consolidate their historic dominance over the region and to use the deal to influence negotiations at the World Trade Organization. While discussions about new agreements on services and agriculture continue at the WTO, it is uncertain whether there will be support for a new broad round of negotiations when the WTO meets in tiny Qatar this fall, far removed from the protesters of Seattle but still riven by internal disagreements that blocked a new round in 1999.

FTAA negotiating groups from 34 countries (excluding Cuba) have come up with an FTAA text that, in the language of negotiators, is "heavily bracketed," meaning that most of the tough points are unsettled. So far that text has been kept secret, although citizen groups in the United States have sued to get it released. But judging from position papers or other documents from the Canadian and U.S. government, it is possible to get some sense of what the FTAA might be like.

Although the proposed FTAA is often described as NAFTA for the Americas, it actually "goes far beyond NAFTA in its scope and power," according to Maude Barlow, chairwoman of The Council of Canadians, Canada's largest public advocacy group. "Essentially, what the FTAA negotiators have done, urged on by the big business community in every country, is to take the most ambitious elements of every global trade and investment agreement—existing or proposed—and pull them all together."

The FTAA will likely include the worst—that is, the most pro-corporate and anti-democratic—elements of both NAFTA and the WTO (as well as the failed MAI). For example, while NAFTA focused on trade in goods, the FTAA is likely to open up trade and investment in all services, including health, education and other now predominantly public services. The United States is pushing for rules that would open up all services to international corporations unless they were specifically excluded, rather than selectively agree on "liberalization" of specific service sectors.

The FTAA is also likely to include the NAFTA provision—not in the WTO—that gives corporations the right to sue governments over violations of the agreement and to have the decisions made by secretive international tribunals with no (or perhaps minimal) public voice. Under NAFTA, corporations have successfully sued governments to overturn regulations or receive compensation for potential lost profits as a result of regulations protecting health and the environment. For example, the Ethyl Corporation forced Canada to reverse its ban on the sale of a dangerous gasoline additive, and Metalclad Corporation won a judgment requiring Mexico to pay

FTAA negotiators have taken the most ambitious elements of every global trade and investment agreement—existing or proposed—and pulled them all together.

\$16.7 million on the grounds that environmental laws prohibiting its toxic waste processing plant were the equivalent of expropriation.

Judging from available information, the FTAA would prohibit regulation of speculative capital flows (such as Chile formerly imposed). It would adopt standards on safety and health from the WTO that give higher priority to trade and put stricter limits on regulation than under NAFTA. It would impose tougher protection of intellectual property rights, like patents (including the criminal penalties for violations established under NAFTA but not the WTO). It would open the door to privatization of many public services through rules on gov-

ernment procurement and competition.

The United States is essentially offering the promise of freer access to its domestic market and greater multinational investment in Latin America in exchange for rules that strengthen the dominance of corporations—mainly based here—over the economies and governments of the hemisphere. The FTAA would lock in the model of development—maximizing exports, shrinking the public sector—that has already been imposed through the structural adjustment programs of the International Monetary Fund with unimpressive results and great hardship for the vast majority of Latin America. It also would put additional downward pressure on Mexican wages as more Latin American countries compete for the transfer of United States manufacturing or other portable work to the broader new free trade area. This in turn would exacerbate threats to many jobs and wages in the United States.

There is apparently—but not surprisingly—no provision for protection of labor rights or the environment in the FTAA. The United States claims to have raised the issues but found no support. But unlike NAFTA, where the main Mexican labor federation supported the government's hostility to labor rights, there appears to be unity among the hemispheric labor movement for labor rights in the FTAA. There is also a growing network of environmental and other citizen movements working together throughout the Americas.

Government negotiators are also divided. Canada's trade minister Pierre Pettigrew has opposed the right of investors to sue governments. Canada also has been involved in trade tiffs with both Brazil and the United States. Brazil is reluctant to accelerate negotiations, since it wants to consolidate its growing influence in South America, and despite defection by Chile, the Mercosur nations of the southern cone—including Brazil—put a higher priority on their common market than on the FTAA. Small Caribbean countries are worried that their special needs are being ignored.

While the Bush administration sets its sights on negotiating the FTAA, it is ignoring the potential time bomb of the growing U.S. trade deficit, which, based on the experience with NAFTA, might grow even bigger with the FTAA.

Over the past three years, the trade deficit—driven mainly by a rapidly growing imbalance in imports and exports of manufactured goods—has soared, reaching a record 3.7 percent of GDP at the end of last year. Developing countries with low wages and few labor rights, especially China, are accounting for a growing share of the deficit. The growth of the U.S. economy has masked a dramatic trade-related phenomenon: Although manufacturing jobs usually increase during a boom, since early 1998 the United States has lost more than 400,000 manufacturing jobs.

This has had devastating consequences on some industries, like steel, which suffers from “dumping” by desperate exporters in a world with an excess of capacity to produce steel and depressed markets outside of the United States. The shrinkage of American manufacturing is partly a result of global trade deals and shifts of investment by U.S. companies to other countries; it is also partly a result of an overvalued dollar. A more general problem is that the incomes of the world’s working population, including those in the United States, have not grown enough to buy the goods being produced. Indeed, in much of the world, as inequality grows, the buying power of working people is actually declining, partly as a result of the deregulated global economy. The result is that the U.S. and world economies are in a precarious position.

Much of the U.S. boom, which has made possible the consumption of the world’s exports, has been financed by a stock market bubble and a great increase in consumer debt by the majority of Americans without stock portfolios. But with the bubble bursting and job losses mounting, the United States cannot so easily buy everyone’s goods. The Federal Reserve

needs to lower interest rates to stimulate the economy and to reduce the value of the dollar, but a depreciating dollar would hurt many countries, including Japan, that are already vulnerable. It could also lead to withdrawal of investment in the United States, the world’s largest debtor nation (as a result of our ongoing trade deficits).


Will all this lead to a global financial crisis? AFL-CIO economist Tom Palley likens the problem to a bathtub, where the level of debt created by trade deficits is the water in the tub. As long as there’s more space, the water—or deficits—can keep gushing in. But a crisis comes when the tub is full. The problem is nobody knows how big the tub is. But the growth in trade deficits is clearly unsustainable over a very long period.

So at a time when deregulation and corporate globalization have increased the instability and inequality of the global economy, the rich countries—led by the United States—are pushing for less restraint on corporate power and international markets. If an international crisis does occur, threatening the global system, workers will still be the primary victims. If those workers were able to organize to raise their wages and social income supports, then the developing crisis might be averted or lessened.


The coming battles over fast track, the FTAA, WTO agreements on services, and other global policy disputes are, at heart, questions of redistribution of wealth and power. Echoing his domestic initiatives on taxes, personal bankruptcy regulations and workplace safety, Bush’s agenda for the global economy is to accelerate the redistribution well under way to those who are already rich and powerful, even at the risk of the system as a whole. ■

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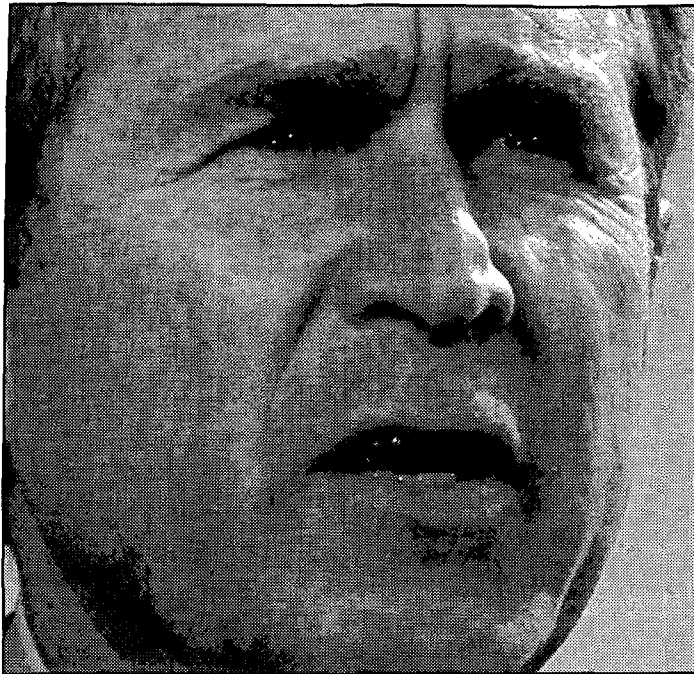
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WHAT'S YOUR ANTI-DRUG?

**NATIONAL DRUG POLICY
WILL BE MORE
CONSERVATIVE THAN
COMPASSIONATE**

WIN MCNAMEE/REUTERS

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

In his first interviews as attorney general, John Ashcroft pledged to “reinvigorate,” “renew,” “refresh” and “re-launch” the war on drugs, arguing that the Clinton administration had been lax in fighting narcotics.

It’s difficult to imagine how Bill Clinton could have been much harsher, short of public executions of drug dealers. Under his administration, federal prisons opened at a rate of almost one a month, confining a population that is now 58 percent drug offenders—almost three times the percentage in state prisons, according to figures from the Washington-based Sentencing Project. The Clinton administration also refused to fund needle-exchange programs, prosecuted medical-marijuana patients, and began to take sides in the Colombian civil war in the name of fighting cocaine.

A devout prohibitionist, Ashcroft is now the top-ranking federal official dealing with drugs. As of early March, President George W. Bush had not yet appointed anyone to head the White House drug-policy office. (Candidates mentioned include former Florida Rep. Bill McCollum, a militant prohibitionist, and Elizabeth Dole, who has backed both more drug treatment and more drug testing.) “Ashcroft is the only person in the country who thinks that drug treatment doesn’t make sense,” says Marc Maurer of the Sentencing Project.

Yet, facing a diverse and growing movement to ameliorate or end prohibition, Bush’s drug policy may turn out to be less fanatically hardline than his father’s. “He’s made some good noises in some good directions,” says Jerry Epstein, president of the Drug Policy Forum of Texas. Last year, Bush suggested that medical marijuana was a states’ rights issue. More recently, he has dropped hints about increasing spending for drug treatment and reducing the 100-to-1 disparity between federal sentences for crack and powder cocaine. (For his part,

Ashcroft has advocated reducing the crack/coke sentencing disparity by increasing penalties for powder cocaine.)

Whether Bush means it is another story. After a Bush aide met with medical-marijuana patient Tiffany Landreth in Austin last September, his office issued a statement that “current federal law bans all marijuana use, and the governor does not support changing those laws.” As governor, Bush signed a law in 1997 increasing the minimum for possession of less than a gram of cocaine—barely enough for one night of “youthful indiscretion”—from probation to six months in a state jail. About 3,000 people are now incarcerated under that law. And Bush also “adamantly supported” school districts that wanted to test all students for drugs, according to William Harrell, head of the Texas branch of the American Civil Liberties Union. “We should all collectively shiver,” Harrell says. Bush’s record, he adds, was one of “total militarized policing and total disregard for constitutional rights.”

Harrell points out that in 1999 the Bush administration named undercover cop Tom Coleman “Lawman of the Year.” Coleman’s accomplishment was setting up the arrests of 43 people in the small Panhandle town of Tulia on cocaine charges. Forty of the people arrested were black, and the ACLU has filed a civil rights lawsuit charging that many of them were framed—in two separate trials, Coleman testified to being in different places at the same time (see “Easy Targets,” page 23). Harrell says the drug task force program that assigned Coleman to Tulia was “designed and directed” by Bush’s office, and specifically targets users and small-time dealers in areas where convictions are easy to get.

Texas now has more people in prison than any state. According to state figures, its 107 prisons, 17 state jails and nine “substance abuse felony punishment” facilities hold 151,000 inmates. A 2000 study by the Washington-based Criminal Justice Institute found that Texas had 1 percent of its entire

population (and 3.9 percent of its black population) in prisons or local jails, the second-highest rate in the nation after Louisiana. One-fifth of them were imprisoned on drug charges. Between 1988 and 1998, according to the Drug Policy Forum of Texas, the state opened 77 new prisons—but just one new state university campus. “Nothing that he did as governor indicated a willingness to move away from prohibition,” Epstein says.

However, unlike his father, who reigned at the height of the '80s crack scare (and also looked the other way at the Nicaraguan contras' fundraising deliveries from Colombia to California), George W. Bush faces a growing anti-drug war movement that includes significant numbers of conservatives. The orthodoxy of prohibition—that illegal drugs breed violence and depravity and must be stamped out by any means necessary—is being challenged on numerous fronts. Nine states and the District of Columbia have passed laws legalizing medical marijuana, despite a 1970 federal law that declares marijuana to have “no accepted medical use.”

One strain in what is awkwardly called the “drug-law-reform movement” focuses on “harm reduction” policies such as needle exchange. It is more realistic to expect addicts to take small steps toward self-preservation than one giant leap to abstinence, the argument goes, and it's better for them to shoot two bags of heroin with a clean needle than to shoot 10 bags with a virus-infested set of “gimmicks.” Another strain, more libertarian and marijuana-oriented, asserts that the government has no right to jail people for private behavior comparable to drinking or home-brewing. Others question the length and inflexibility of drug sentences, the numbers of people in prison, and the racial disparities among those behind bars.

New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson, a Republican with libertarian sensibilities, advocates legalizing marijuana. While he believes that employers have the right to drug-test workers, and personally opposes drug use, Johnson is one of the few politicians who doesn't say he “experimented” with marijuana. “I smoked it,” he emphasizes. Another Republican, New York Gov. George Pataki, has proposed some easing of the state's draconian “Rockefeller laws,” which

mandate 15 years to life for possession of four ounces of heroin or cocaine, regardless of the defendant's role in the deal.

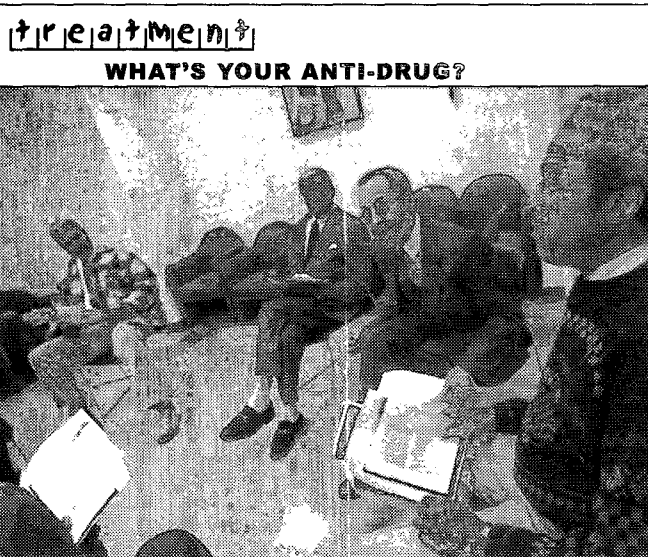
And with three-fourths of the nation's drug prisoners being black or Latino (that figure is more than 90 percent in New York, Maryland and Illinois), African-Americans, whose neighborhoods bore the worst of the crack-trade wars, are increasingly weary of seeing multitudes of their young men locked up. Black-community pressure got President Clinton to free Kemba Smith, who served six years of a 24-year sentence essentially for being a crack wholesaler's ex-girlfriend. “I don't think the law was intentionally designed to oppress one group of people over another. But in its implementation, it certainly has had a disproportionate effect on people of color,” former Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke told *High Times* last year.

Some of this dissent may reach into the Bush administration. Epstein speculates that policy ultimately will be determined by whoever wins the power struggle between committed drug warriors, advocates of more treatment and a handful of libertarians. One possibility that may emerge would be a “compassionate conservative” model: continued prohibition coupled with a few token statements and programs to give it a veneer of humanity. “Status quo with a little sugar on top,” says Allen St. Pierre of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML).

“I'm more hopeful than I expected to be,” says Kevin Zeese of Common Sense for Drug Policy. He sees possible movement in five areas: increased treatment, easing mandatory minimum sentences, reducing racial profiling, eliminating the crack/cocaine sentencing disparity, and maybe legalizing needle exchanges. Ashcroft is an ardent foe of needle-exchange programs, Zeese notes, but Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson funded them while he was governor of Wisconsin.

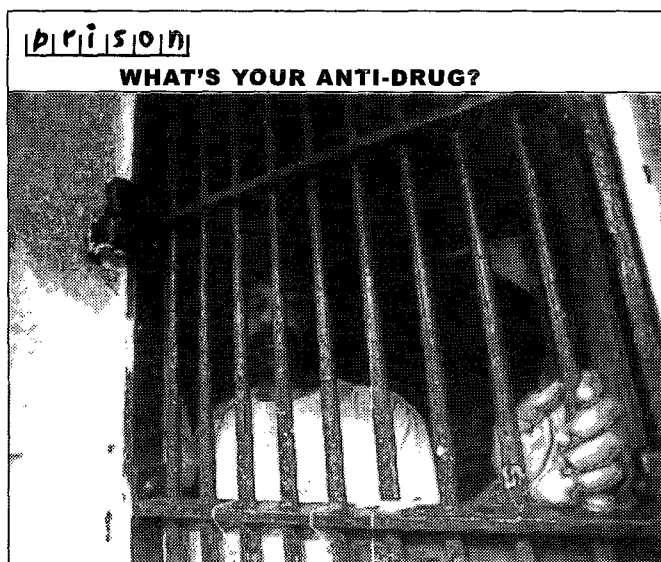
Drug courts, in which defendants are sentenced to mandatory treatment instead

of jail, would fit the “compassionate conservative” model perfectly. They are the centerpiece of Pataki's proposal in New York, which he released in January. It would allow judges to send some people charged with possession of cocaine or heroin to a court-run rehabilitation program, with



Treatment programs, like this one in Harlem, get little funding.

KRT PHOTO BY SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS



Under Clinton, federal prisons opened at a rate of one per month.

CHRIS COZZONE

probation if they complete it, and prison if they don't. However, most of the state's drug prisoners are low-level dealers with prior felony convictions and would not be eligible. (Democratic legislators have introduced a counterproposal that includes them.)

But compulsory treatment brings up several caveats. First, there's little funding for voluntary treatment, so focusing resources on compulsory treatment means that poorer addicts would have to be arrested before they could get help. Second, if it is crossed with Bush's plans to turn social services over to "faith-based" groups, the result could be forcing drug users into programs telling them the only way to conquer their addiction is to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Third, treatment costs money. Bush has promised to add \$1 billion in federal funding, a small fraction of the amount spent on drug enforcement. It is generally estimated that about 30 percent of total government drug spending goes to treatment and education. President Clinton vowed to increase that proportion, St. Pierre recalls, but never did.

Whatever hopes people have about Bush, they do appear to contain at least some wishful thinking, largely stemming from the "Nixon going to China" theory: that it will take a Republican to end the war on drugs, someone free of any hippie-liberal "soft on crime" stigma. Gary Johnson might fit that bill, but it is extremely difficult to imagine George W. Bush legalizing marijuana.

For one, a significant part of his political base comes from the culture warriors of the Christian right, for whom marijuana and drugs are a central moral issue. The Family Research Council opposes legalizing industrial hemp, the minimal-THC strain of cannabis grown for fiber. FRC drug-policy specialist Robert Maginnis writes that "hemp is clearly identified with the counterculture" (not exactly untrue) and that legalizing it "sends the wrong message" about marijuana. The FRC also opposes medical marijuana. In a pending Supreme Court case, it filed one

of only two amicus briefs supporting the government's appeal of a lower-court ruling that "medical necessity" may exempt an Oakland "cannabis buyers' club" from federal prosecution. Bush also has to face a potential quagmire in Colombia. While U.S. intervention there clearly fails the "Powell Doctrine" tests of a clear objective and an easy victory, Bush seems unlikely to abandon a military mission in progress, especially one supposedly against the twin demons of drug cartels and leftist guerrillas. (Plan Colombia conveniently ignores the right-wing paramilitaries' involvement in the drug trade.)

Bush's delay in picking a drug czar could be a sign that he wants to avoid drug issues as much as possible. It is hard to argue that prohibition is not an awful flop. It can't stop what it's meant to stop: The nation's prison and jail population has quadrupled since Ronald Reagan took office 20 years ago, but cocaine and heroin prices have plummeted. Most Americans under 55 have either smoked marijuana themselves or know people who have, yet pot busts now average 700,000 a year, with 70,000 in New York City alone last year. And the excesses of the war on drugs, from search-and-seizure abuses to the racial disparities in who goes to prison, are increasingly obvious.

On issues such as racial profiling, Epstein says, "They have to do damage control. They can't avoid addressing it." But does Bush have the desire to make significant changes, or the courage to face the furious opposition that would come if he did? If you can't arrest your way out of the problem, but don't want to consider legalization, what do you do?

"He couldn't even tell his kids that he'd been arrested for drunk driving," notes NORML's St. Pierre. "Considering his inability to talk about drugs during the campaign, and his evasiveness about his own drug use, I hope lack of communication doesn't become national policy." ■

Steven Wishnia is a senior editor at High Times and the author of Exit 25 Utopia (The Imaginary Press).



Colombia offers the twin demons of drug cartels and leftist guerrillas.

ELIANA APONTE/REUTERS

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WHAT'S YOUR ANTI-DRUG?

EASY TARGETS: THE DRUG WAR TEARS THROUGH A SMALL TEXAS TOWN

BY JASMINA KELEMEN
TULIA, TEXAS

In the early morning hours of July 23, 1999, Swisher County police raided trailers and public housing units here, arresting residents accused of selling cocaine to an undercover mole. The culmination of an 18-month sting operation in conjunction with the Panhandle Narcotics Task Force, police arrested 43 people, 40 of whom were black—more than 10 percent of the town's black community.

Local newspapers quickly set about congratulating the operation. One editorial excoriated the "scumbag dealers" and likened them to a "cancer" deserving a "major dose of chemotherapy behind bars." The undercover police officer was later named "Lawman of the Year" by the Texas Department of Public Safety.

But the newspapers and accolades consistently failed to mention that no drugs, weapons nor assets were seized during the surprise morning raid. Indeed, residents insist they never saw evidence of the expensive type of drugs poor locals were accused and convicted of selling. In the nearly two years since the bust, the racial disparity of the arrests and the dubious testimony of the undercover agent has led to national press attention, lawsuits from the NAACP and ACLU and an investigation by the Justice Department.

Tulia is a scrappy town of 5,000 surrounded by fields of cotton, located between Lubbock and Amarillo. Faced with few opportunities besides manual labor jobs at the local livestock auctioning barn, the mostly black, idle and disillusioned kids who couldn't afford to escape after graduation became easy fodder for Texas police departments earning their bread and butter fighting the drug war.

This type of operation is common throughout the state. Narcotics task forces depend on high body counts to keep the federal funds flowing. Devastated by a shrinking rural economy throughout this part of the country, blacks are

those least able to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Hence, if a task force wants convictions, its best bet is to focus its investigations across the tracks. Statistics compiled by the Justice Policy Institute show that in Texas blacks are incarcerated at a rate seven times higher than whites. This is nearly 63 percent higher than the national average. Robertson County District Attorney John Paschall, former head of the South Central Texas Task Force, says the number of black men arrested is so high because "they're the easiest ones to get because they're selling on the street."

But Gary Buchanan, police chief of the east Texas town of Brenham and director of the Independence Narcotics Task Force, says task forces have lost sight of their goal and are more focused on catching easy targets rather than stemming the flow of drugs. "It's a numbers game," Buchanan says. "We're fighting the same battles as 10 years ago. Heroin is coming back. LSD is back. You don't have to show any impact, just numbers."



Billy Wafer was freed after proving he was at work when police alleged he was selling drugs somewhere else.

Sam Barrow, a Tulia resident who had four relatives caught in the sting. "A \$10 rock, OK. But they were accusing people of carrying an eight ball in their pockets, and you know just the other day he tried to get \$5 off of you for gas."

Most of those arrested agreed to plea bargains with prosecutors. For those suspects whose cases went to trial, part-time

In Tulia, blacks experienced firsthand the dubious methods available to task forces that wish to artificially boost their statistics. The black community knew something had gone awry when they learned people were being indicted for selling powder cocaine. Police charged them with delivering "eight balls"—an eighth of an ounce of cocaine, which at \$180 a pop is significantly more expensive than the small bags of marijuana and cheap rocks of crack cocaine usually found in this depressed rural community. "Ain't nobody got powder in this town," says

cotton farmer and full-time civil libertarian Gary Gardner was skeptical they could receive a fair hearing in Tulia, because he felt the city had an interest in whipping up drug hysteria. He urged the defendants to request a change of venue. The requests were denied for all but two white defendants, and the court quickly began dispensing its own version of justice—multiple life sentences for several deliveries of cocaine and 20 years for a single delivery with no prior convictions. Additional felony charges were tacked onto the cases because the agent claimed the deals had occurred in a public park. In all, 22 of those arrested were sent to prison.

The stiff sentences were made possible by a series of laws then Gov. George W. Bush signed in 1997 as part of his “get tough on crime” platform. A first-offense cocaine charge, which had previously been a misdemeanor punished with mandatory probation, was upgraded to a felony. He also created “drug-free zones” around schools and parks, in which any drug activity was automatically a felony charge.

Even more disturbing was the incredibly low standard of evidence needed for a conviction. All of the indictments centered around the uncorroborated testimony of Tom Coleman, the undercover agent planted by the Panhandle Regional Task Force. The sole witness against the defendants, Coleman’s police reports never amounted to more than a couple of paragraphs, and he frequently presented conflicting testimony while on the stand.

A probing defense attorney, Paul Holloway, discovered Coleman had been described as a “compulsive liar” in court documents and had been arrested during the sting operation for a string of unpaid debts in other counties. He also discovered that Coleman’s former boss, Cochran County Sheriff Ken Burke, had filed a complaint with the Texas Commission of Law Enforcement (TCLE), the state agency that licenses police officers, in which he wrote: “Mr. Coleman should not be in law enforcement.” The judge denied the defense motion to introduce any of the evidence about Coleman’s past.

Further impugning Coleman’s credibility was the case of Billy Wafer, who was arrested and charged with arranging the delivery of 2.3 grams of crack. Wafer was more than nine years into a 10-year probation, and faced life in prison once charges of breaking probation and delivering drugs near a “drug-free zone” were added. Yet timecards and his boss’ testimony proved Wafer was at work when the alleged sale occurred, so the charges were dropped. But not before he spent two weeks in jail, lost his job and was turned down for a home loan.

Holloway charges that local law enforcement officials worked in concert to manufacture charges against Tulia’s mostly indigent black community. Some defendants did admit selling crack to Coleman, but Holloway speculates that the cocaine found in the reported deliveries came from a single source that Coleman himself spliced and mixed with the crack to upgrade the charges. Holloway believes Coleman was charging the task force for purchases of cocaine but buying crack. A chemist found that the amount of cocaine in many of these baggies was not even enough to get high on and was of poor quality. Yet due to a quirk in Texas drug law, an eight ball has to contain only a trace of cocaine for the entire weight to be registered as a cocaine delivery. The judge refused to provide

funds for an outside investigator and denied the request to run laboratory tests that could prove Holloway’s theories.

What most upsets Holloway is that the judge’s obstinacy and the jury’s willingness to overlook Coleman’s often conflicting testimony is perfectly legal according to Texas judicial procedure. “It’s a joke to do criminal defense here,” Holloway says. “If the jury wants to sit and watch a cop lie, they can. These were marginal people on the stand and [the jury] just decided to believe the cop.”

William Harrell, head of the Texas ACLU, agrees and blames the Tulia debacle on Texas’ poor record of indigent defense. Texas, he says, is at the “bottom of the barrel” when it comes to defending poor people. Although statewide statistics are not available, a 1999 *Houston Chronicle* study of 1,800 first-offense cocaine charges found that 21 percent of defendants who hired attorneys were sentenced to jail or prison time compared to 53 percent of defendants with court-appointed attorneys.

Judges in Texas are elected in a culture where “getting tough on crime” enjoys bipartisan support and constitutional niceties are often ignored, Harrell says. These same judges appoint defense attorneys and determine their salaries. Critics say the current method of appointing lawyers inherently discourages defense attorneys from mounting a zealous defense and pressures lawyers to seek plea bargains. “It’s an unconstitutional system of criminal defense,” Harrell says.

Holloway, who spent nearly 1,000 hours researching his defense, was authorized to receive payment for only the first 10 hours he spent on a case. “They didn’t want me to defend this case,” says Holloway, who ended up accepting a plea bargain for his clients. “It was like making a deal with the devil, I knew we couldn’t win.”


Yet as a result of the racial imbalance of the sting’s victims and shoddy police work presented to the courts, the NAACP and the ACLU filed a lawsuit and a complaint with the Justice Department, claiming that Coleman conspired with the sheriff and the district attorney to deny local blacks their civil rights. Prisoners report that FBI agents have interviewed them about Coleman’s behavior during the operation. County officials and Coleman’s supervisors refused to comment on the charges.

Sadly, this small town is not alone. Harrell says the ACLU is currently investigating six “Tulias” around the state. “There’s a pattern of narcotics task forces operating on DEA funding, hiring the most amazingly unscrupulous informants to hunt down suspects, 90 percent of whom end up being black or Latino.”

To protect Texans against the drug war, the ACLU and the NAACP have proposed a series of laws they’re calling the “Tulia Proposals,” which would require corroboration for testimony of undercover officers, limit the authority of judges to exclude evidence pertaining to a person’s innocence and provide public access to TCLE records.

“Our system rests on the premise that the gatekeeper of evidence will act justly,” Holloway says. “Coleman could steamroll anyone because in a swearing match between a cop and a citizen, the cop wins. From my perspective it’s a really scary world.” ■

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THE SAME BATTLES
AS 10 YEARS AGO.
YOU DON’T HAVE
TO SHOW IMPACT,
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Self Defense

A new book leads Mumia to fire his legal team

By Dave Lindorff

Philadelphia

Mumia Abu-Jamal, the black journalist and former Black Panther who has spent the past 19 years on Pennsylvania's Death Row for the murder of a white cop, has fired his legal defense team in response to the pending publication of a book authored by one of his key attorneys.

Abu-Jamal made the dramatic move on March 1 in a handwritten request filed with Federal District Judge William H. Yohn Jr., who is currently considering Abu-Jamal's last-ditch habeas corpus appeal of his state court murder conviction. In that brief he says he needs to drop his attorneys because the book, *Executing Justice: An Inside Account of the Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal* (St. Martin's Press), represents a breach of legal ethics and of lawyer-client confidentiality by attorney Dan Williams.

Abu-Jamal doesn't explain his reasons for wanting to toss out lead counsel Leonard Weinglass and several other lawyers associated with the case along with Williams, but there is speculation that he may want the case to move in a different, more political direction—or that he intends to be his own lead counsel, as he attempted to do during his original trial until blocked by Judge Albert Sabo.

Williams, a death penalty appeals expert, expresses regret at being dropped from the case, which he has been involved in since 1994, and claims that Abu-Jamal knew for months of his plans to write a book. "I provided to Mumia, through his agent, a detailed synopsis of each chapter before I wrote the book," he says.

He further insists that there has been no violation of ethics and no breach of confidence with his client, saying, "Everything in this book was already on the public record." He explains that the arguments among defense attorneys, and the broader disputes over legal strategy that are reported in detail in the book, all occurred in the presence of other people—usually members of the Abu-Jamal support network—or were previously published. "There is

nothing in this book that violates legal ethics," insists Williams, who says he continues to believe that Abu-Jamal is "innocent and, most importantly, has never been given a meaningful opportunity to refute the prosecution's flawed case against him."

The book itself, at more than 300 pages, provides the most detailed analysis of this complex case to date, and invites controversy by charging both the prosecution and some Mumia backers alike with overstating and misrepresenting their cases. Williams retraces the original 1982 trial, in which a jury of two blacks and 10 whites convicted Abu-Jamal of first-degree murder and sentenced him to death. He then reviews the subsequent Post-Conviction Relief Act (PCRA) rehearing of the facts in the case, where serious questions were raised about the reliability and honesty of earlier prosecution witnesses (as well as new evidence that the prosecution withheld from the defense). He argues that there are sound reasons to suspect that Abu-Jamal did not fire the first shot back in 1981—a key part of the prosecution's successful portrayal of this as a first-degree murder case.

Instead, Williams argues that the evidence suggests officer Daniel Faulkner shot Abu-Jamal in the chest first, before being shot fatally himself—a scenario which would open the door to a self-defense argument. Williams' theory, based on eyewitness testimony, has someone else firing the fatal shot



Mumia says one of his lawyers violated legal ethics.

that killed the officer. But he seems to suggest that this is less important than proving that Abu-Jamal was not the cold-blooded assassin the prosecution made him out to be at trial, and getting him off of Death Row. (His view is that it would be much easier to overturn Abu-Jamal's death sentence, and even his first-degree murder conviction, than to have him declared innocent.) Williams goes on to charge that, in promoting the theory of a grand conspiracy to kill Abu-Jamal, some of Abu-Jamal's supporters—including MOVE and lawyers from the Trotskyist Partisan Defense Committee (PDC)—are more interested in "exploiting" his case for political ends than in overturning his death sentence.

Those conspiracy advocates, who have seen the hand of everything from the FBI to Abu-Jamal's original attorney Anthony Jackson behind his conviction, undercut the strength of his case, Williams argues. Weinglass and he struggled behind the scenes to keep several witnesses promoted by PDC attorneys Rachel Wolkenstein and Jon Piper off the stand during the PCRA hearing, fearing that their testimony was unbelievable and would tarnish other more credible witnesses. Those witnesses ended up testifying, only to be easily dismantled under the withering cross examination of prosecution attorneys who had the support of the openly pro-prosecution Judge Sabo.

Later, after the PCRA hearing was over, Williams says Wolkenstein and Piper tried to convince him and Weinglass they had found a new witness who could show that Faulkner had actually been a stoolie for the FBI, which was investigating corruption in the Center City Police District, and that he had been the victim of a police-arranged mob hit designed to look like Abu-Jamal's doing.

Recalling a meeting at Weinglass' loft where this witness was first discussed, Williams says he was "enraged, convinced that bona fide lunacy had set in." Staying behind to talk with Weinglass after the session, he asked his one-time mentor, "Are you seriously considering this?" When Weinglass and Williams rejected the witness and did not include the mob-hit story in their habeas corpus appeal, Williams says the two PDC lawyers quit the case in protest. (In *These Times*' efforts to talk with Wolkenstein and Piper about their departure from the case were unsuccessful.)

Explaining his reasons for going public with such controversial material, just as Abu-Jamal is awaiting word on his critical habeas appeal, Williams says he was driven to write the book to prevent the case from drifting again in what he is convinced is the wrong direction. "This case had and still has the promise and potential to be a powerful referendum on what is wrong with capital punishment and the criminal justice system," he says bitterly. "But it hasn't lived up to that potential because a small fringe element has taken control over the movement, and that has resulted in Mumia's case being, in many people's view, an oddity on the fringe of the extreme left-wing of our society. In essence it's been marginalized."

Weinglass, who says he first saw the manuscript of *Executing Justice* on February 20, and who notified Abu-Jamal of it on February 22 as soon as he had finished reading it, isn't buying that argument, though. The veteran political attorney, who with William Kunstler defended the Chicago Seven, has harsh words for his erstwhile colleague. "I don't think this book does any legal damage to the case," Weinglass says. "But I do think that it's done political damage to the unity of the support organization. I don't agree with Dan's analysis that Mumia's case has been marginalized, and I don't think that it's the place for a lawyer in a political case to be criticizing and evaluating the value of a support network. He should have shown the manuscript to me and to Mumia before he sent it to the publisher."

Others in the "Free Mumia" movement, which in recent years has become a global affair, are even harsher in criticizing Williams. "We think it was a serious mistake for Dan Williams to publish such a book, even if written with the best of intentions, without consulting Mumia," says a statement released by the executive committee of Refuse and Resist!, a New York-based organization

that has helped organize international support for Abu-Jamal.

"Dan Williams was absolutely wrong in writing that book," says Pam Africa, a spokeswoman for MOVE. As to the decision by Abu-Jamal to dump Weinglass and the rest of the legal team as well as Williams over the book, Africa says, "We support what Mumia is doing. If he wants the whole team gone, he's the one who's on Death Row."

The fiercest attack on Williams comes from the PDC, which in a statement calls his book a "malicious act" and adds, "Even within the loose 'ethics' of the legal profession, publication of such a book by an attorney involved in an active case, much less one in which the client's life hangs in the balance, is an abomination."

Although Weinglass has criticized Williams for writing the book, and has made it clear he does not want to be fired as lead attorney, the PDC statement goes on to accuse both Williams and Weinglass of trying to exit the case. "Williams' unconscionable act ... is now serving as a ticket for the two longstanding lead attorneys on the defense team to bail out."

"The PDC's suggestion that Len and I were part of some grand conspiracy is symptomatic of what I have been trying to fight against," Williams says.

Whatever Abu-Jamal's reasons for getting rid of his legal team, the decision is seen as a risky move by some legal experts. "I think the book is a jewel," says noted defense attorney Martin Garbus. "It answers a lot of questions people have had about this case, and it has convinced me of Mumia's innocence. And the firing of Williams and the defense team is unfortunate. But the firing of Len Weinglass, who had nothing to do with the book, is tragic. Weinglass is one of the best lawyers in the country, and by firing him, Mumia is doing himself a terrible disservice."

Meanwhile, advocates of Abu-Jamal's execution, including the Fraternal Order of Police and the slain officer's widow, Maureen Faulkner, have been trying to get mileage out of the discord in pro-Mumia ranks over Williams' book. In a statement last week, Faulkner said Abu-Jamal's decision to fire his attorneys was "making a charade out of the legal process." She called the move "just another in a long line of transparent, offbeat legal ploys employed by a guilty man who hopes to disrupt and prolong the appeals process."

"We're optimistic that this is a sign the deck chairs are being rearranged on the Titanic," says Michael Smerconish, a Philadelphia attorney who represents an organization called Justice for Police Officer Daniel Faulkner.

It remains possible that Weinglass could stay on as Abu-Jamal's attorney. Aside from the PDC, critics of Williams in the Free Mumia movement at large, and Abu-Jamal himself, have avoided any criticism of Weinglass, who says he remains available. "Of course I'm willing to do anything and everything that's asked of me for Mumia," he says.

At this point, it is up to Judge Yohn, an appointee of former President George Bush, to decide how to respond to Abu-Jamal's request. ■

Dave Lindorff is writing a book about the Abu-Jamal case for Common Courage Press. This article was researched with the help of the Fund for Constitutional Government.

The History of Beginnings

By Paul Haacke

Alasdair Gray's motto—"Work as if you are living in the early days of a better nation"—is addressed to people of all nations, but it may be the best expression of the current cultural

The Book of Prefaces

Edited by Alasdair Gray
Bloomsbury
640 pages, \$49.95

After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland

By Tom Nairn
Granta
324 pages, \$24.95

and political renaissance in Scotland. First taken from a Canadian poet for the front-page of Gray's 1983 collection *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*, and now appearing again on the cover of his long-awaited literary anthology *The Book of Prefaces*, this romantic call-to-arms epitomizes Scotland's bittersweet hopes and self-deprecating promises for the future.

While most of the news media covering Britain today have been busy with the Royals and the Blairs in London and the troubles in Northern Ireland, Scotland has been working to build a new, resolutely left-wing parliament, a fresh and edgy art, music and literary culture, and a more international country out of one that has always been far warmer to Ireland, Wales and the Continent than its more powerful southern neighbor. According to Tom Nairn's incisive and provocative book *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*, this national re-emergence is in fact helping to bring about the peaceful and democratic "break-up of Britain," as he predicted in his 1972 book of that name, and the end of the entire United Kingdom as we know it.

For as devolution progresses, Nairn argues, it will eventually pave the way to a post-nationalist United Kingdom that will no longer be an imperial state centered on London, but an outdated

misnomer representing an "archipelago-system" of interrelated yet distinct cultures within a greater European Union. Scotland, in turn, will remain to the left of the increasingly conciliatory and traditionalist third way, and, unfettered by Toryism and Royalism, which are virtually nonexistent there, will ultimately rise above it.

Turning Francis Fukuyama on his head, Nairn explains with cutting irony that "the end of history lay for Scots in 1707," when the country was joined with England through a shotgun wedding of the latter's design. (In a review of Nairn's book, the *End of History* theorist shot back in *Prospect Magazine* under the banner "Don't Do It

British industry, capitalism and colonialism exploded over the next few centuries, the marriage managed to last throughout the rise and fall of the British Empire, two world wars and the triumph of America as the world's English-speaking superpower.

Although Scottish nationalism experienced a revival in the 20th century—especially in the '60s with the collapse of local industries and the rise of anti-colonial movements around the world—it was only after Thatcher took over Britain in 1979 that the marriage really began to fall apart. Under Tory rule from London for almost two decades, the overwhelmingly Labour-supporting Scots grew ever more disenfranchised from British life, becoming guinea pigs for right-wing political and economic experiments that they never supported in the first place. So when Tony Blair (who is of Scottish origin himself) came to power supporting devolution—and when the referendum for Scottish home rule was finally passed in 1998—the dark clouds of conservatism appeared all but swept away.

Except the story does not end there. For Nairn, it continues with Blairism turning out to be a weak, unsatisfactory solution to Thatcherism, and the Scottish body politic rising up to supplant the very man who helped create it in the first place—just like the uncanny heroine of Alasdair Gray's 1992 novel *Poor Things*, who escapes the paternalistic, Frankenstein-like scientist who gave her life only to become his more enlightened, socialist replacement in the end.



Britannia," arguing that devolution will spell trouble for both British and American imperialism—as if that were a bad thing.) Because Scotland was not powerful enough to refuse its longtime oppressor's offers, and because both nations benefited from each other as

And so in stark contrast to the closed, conservative rhetoric of the end of history, the re-emergence of Scotland is opening up a new and progressive sense of beginning. For regardless of what changes devolution will or could bring, a remarkable creativity has already been flowering in Scottish culture for years, and in many ways, writers have been at the center of it all.

Over the past 10 to 20 years, a number of Scottish writers have emerged, often from working-class backgrounds, to international acclaim: not just *Trainspotting* author Irvine Welsh, but Booker-prize winner James Kelman, Iain Banks, William Boyd, A.L. Kennedy, Andrew O'Hagan, Alan Warner, Janice Galloway, crime writers Philip Kerr, Ian Rankin and Christopher Brookmyre, and even J.K. Rowling, who finished her first Harry Potter book thanks to a grant from the Scottish Arts Council.

But the writer who in many ways prefigured this literary renaissance in the '70s and '80s—Alasdair Gray—is woefully under-recognized here in the States and only somewhat more so in England. This is a shame, not only because his imagination has been one of the driving forces behind the growth of Scottish literature, but because he is one of the more innovative and entertaining writers living anywhere today.

Perhaps the best symbol of the renaissance that Gray helped engender is the recent publication of his life's work, *The Book of Prefaces*, an historical collection of beginnings assembled in poetic opposition to the rise of Anglo-American conservatism. A bestseller in Scotland when published last summer, *The Book of Prefaces* is literally an anthology of prefaces, introductions, prologues and forwards to famous works of "literate thought" in the English language, beginning in the seventh century and ending, due to copyright costs, at the beginning of the 20th.

Colorful in style, with witty asides and broad critiques, the book is also colorful in production: While the prefaces themselves are printed in black in the middle of each page, they are accompanied by commentary, illustrations and titles in bright red along the margins—a visual effect that only further highlights the strange fact everything in the book is both introduction and body. "This book is NOT a monster created by a literary Baron Frankenstein," Gray explains on the inside of his characteristically witty and artful dust jacket, "but a unique history of how literature spread and developed through three British nations and most North American states."

In many ways, Gray is a curious novelty among writers today. For one, he

designs and illustrates his books himself, his visual style like that of a modern-day William Blake under the influence of Glaswegian art nouveau designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh. For another, his leftist worldview is imbued with a uniquely Scottish double-consciousness

Scotland has been building a more international country, with a left-wing parliament and a fresh and edgy art, music and literary culture.

that comes through with charming irreverence (if not arrogance) in most of what he writes. And with regard to form, Gray has tried almost everything: At once a passionate experimentalist and a genre-bending populist, his curiously childlike "anxiety of influence" is so offset by passion and irony that he has managed to sew satire and sentiment, fantasy and realism into miraculously seamless and animated wholes.

Gray's most lauded work is his best-selling first novel, *Lanark* (begun in 1969 but not published in full until 1981), a visionary, nonlinear *Bildungsroman* that shifts between post-industrial Glasgow and a fantastic version of it called "Unthank." It has been considered a kind of Scottish *Ulysses*, but its influences are so diverse that it is impossible to cite only one (Gray actually lists many of them in the "Index of Plagiarisms" near the end of the book). Some of his other novels include the aforementioned *Poor Things*; *The Fall of Kelvin Walker*, a comic fable about a Nietzschean young man from a small Scottish village who tries to climb to the top of the power elite in '60s London; and the wicked, quasi-pornographic novel 1982 *Janine*, which parodies both Anglo-American conservatism and the masculine conventions of working-class Scottish fiction by adopting the frustrated voice of a blue-collar, Tory alcoholic who drifts between drunken memory and fantasy while "tippling" in his hotel bedroom.

Of all Gray's works, however, it is *The Book of Prefaces* that has been labored over the longest. After several setbacks, it is the culmination of 16 years of work and significant editorial input from some 30 other writers, including Kelman, Kennedy and Galloway, poets Liz Lochhead and Tom Leonard, and scholars Angus Calder, Susan Castillo and Duncan Wu. From a witty and opinionated perspective—a welcome departure from the false objectivity of the conventionally liberal Norton or Oxford anthologies—the book traces the history of writing from "The First English," (such as the earliest translation of Genesis, attributed to Caedmon of Northumbria circa 675, and *Beowulf*) and "English Remade" (e.g. Chaucer), up through "The Great Flowering" of Marlowe, Spenser, Donne and Shakespeare and the period "Between Two Revolutions," where we find the likes of Hobbes, Milton, Bunyan, Behn and Dryden.

After that we have the rise of literary modernity in "The Establishment"—canonical favorites like Defoe, Swift, Fielding, Richardson, Sterne and philosophers Locke, Hume and Bentham, and "The Disturbed Established"—everyone else's favorites, like Paine, Blake, Austen, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, Poe and the Shelleys (not to mention Edmund Burke). The book comes to a close just before the rise of modernism with "Liberal English," where we find a range of British, Irish and American writers like Tennyson, Charlotte Brontë, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Hawthorne, Melville, Dickens, Eliot, Whitman, Darwin, Mill, Twain, Stevenson, Wilde, Conrad and Shaw.

The commentary that runs in red throughout the book keeps all of this firmly in place, mostly by explicating unjust social contexts, cutting the grandiose down to size and giving the under-appreciated their rightful due (exemplified by the opening line of the first essay "On What Led to English Literature": "Babies embarrass masterful men who find it queer that once they too could only wail, suck and excrete"). Gray's wonderfully sharp tongue, made even more cutting by the relative lack of space in the margins, renders even the simplest critical points uproarious. For instance: "Defoe: London Bachelor's son ... prints Robinson Crusoe as a true tale warning all

youths in the middle station of life, to do as dad orders & never go to sea; quietly lets that moral disappear: Crusoe ends ruling a busy island of faithful blacks."

Or, on Gerard Manley Hopkins' religiosity: "Certainly those of us who think that Christ and the Church are very little of absolutely everything are often left asking: What use to us is a fettered propagandist of spectacular literary skill? However, at the very least, possibly nowhere outside of Dante has an insistent and often aggressive credalism been so voluptuously well expressed."

And finally, Gray argues that the violence of the French Revolution was nothing compared to "those killed in the seven-year war between Austria and Prussia thirty years before, a war that enlarged one nation at the expense of the other, did no harm to the monarchs who ordered it, gave hope of a better future to nobody."

Of course, any critic could find something to complain about in a project so bold and ambitious, and by no means does this one purport to be objective, exhaustive or fair. Some readers' favorite authors may well be absent—"Where's Emerson? Where's Thoreau?" an American might complain—and indeed, Gray himself admits in his postscript that he regrets excluding Henry James and William Morris. But aside from Arthur Conan Doyle, those who are certainly not overlooked are the major Scottish writers of intellectual and literary history.

The book also betrays more serious problems, however. Although there are a number of important women writers represented—there's even extra effort to include Virginia Woolf, whose discussion in *A Room of One's Own* of Aphra Behn is adapted for the book's running commentary—most of the women who are included are casually referred to only by their first names: "Mary" for Mary Wollstonecraft or Mary Shelley, "Charlotte" for Charlotte Brontë, and so on.

Furthermore, if "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line," as W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in his 1903 preface to *The Souls of Black Folk*, it is one left starkly absent in Gray's anthology, which does not include Du Bois or any other writer of color. This is probably more a symptom of the book's Eurocentric framework

rather than any narrow kind of Scottish nationalism, which, despite its politically shifty past, now rails against racism and xenophobia in the name of democratic socialism. To be fair, Gray does lament in his postscript that copyright costs made him abandon his original plan to continue through the remainder of the 20th century and include "those who now write Australian, Asian, African and Caribbean kinds of English." But since the book managed to make enough room for Wilfred Owen's last-breath response to World War I, it remains at least questionable why African-American culture was left to be represented only by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Huckleberry Finn*.

Despite these limitations, *The Book of Prefaces* is an indisputably important work, a major addition to intellectual history and literary criticism that should be both welcomed and well-thumbed. For ultimately, Gray's eccentric anthology offers nothing less than a useful, ironically-distanced approach to modern humanism. At the beginning of his postscript, Gray admits he did have some shortcomings when he first embarked on the book: "You may deduce, dear reader, that although I was then over fifty I still believed in the progressive view of history—believed that each generation

had added good new social and scientific and artistic works to those of the past, thus giving more people comfort, security and freedom for the future."

But Gray has come to question this view. For given the "world-wide triumph of international capitalism with United States and British armed forces as its most militant powers," and, in Britain, "the biggest sale of public property to private businesses since the dissolution of the monasteries in 1540, the abolition of common land in the 1820s," he recognizes that it may be a while before the horrific injustices and inequalities of history can really be undone. On a more sober note, he concludes that if nothing else, a progressive public education remains the best way for everyone to have an equal opportunity for advancement, just as it helped him and other working-class kids gain knowledge when free access to learning was still one of Britain's main priorities.

Since even this is up for grabs these days, Gray ends his book by calling it a "memorial" to such an education—but all hope is not lost. For future readers, his dust jacket provides a clear warning: "Only the rich and illiterate can ignore our anthology." ■

Paul Haacke, a writer in New York, recently spent some time in Glasgow.

Loving the Highlife

By G. Pascal Zachary

ACCRA, GHANA

Sitting in an air-conditioned music studio, the afternoon heat of this African capital seems a universe away. From his very seat, next to a soundboard, Faisal Helwani has recorded some of the legends of Ghanaian music: "highlife" bands and traditional singers who helped the country gain a reputation, by the mid-'60s, as the center of African music.

The highlife sound originated in Ghana earlier in the 20th century. Hundreds of highlife singles were cut in the '30s and '40s, spreading the music—rolling and thunderous, with hints of Cuban jazz and village rhythms—throughout West Africa. With Ghana's independence in 1957,

indigenous music was encouraged and Accra once supported more than 50 highlife bands. But now only two clubs regularly book live music and just a handful of bands exist.

To Helwani's distress, Ghana is awash in Western pop and the music scene is a faint echo of its heyday, a consequence of the country's long years of economic decline, military coups and the pervasive influence of the multinational corporations who dominate the world's recorded music. Having once run the hottest nightclub in the city—and for 10 years never going to bed before dawn—Helwani now turns in early every night.

"To be hip in Ghana," sneers Helwani, who is 54 years old, "you have to listen to



Ghanaian producer Faisal Helwani: "People said I was polluting the airwaves, polluting our culture."

Helwani, who subsidizes his musical interests from his property holdings and trading business, is obsessed with local sounds. In the '70s, he recorded E.T. Mensah, recognized as Ghana's most popular highlife bandleader but by then ignored and unrecorded. (His upbeat, Latin-tinged "All for You" is a highlife classic.) He also discovered a blind folk singer, the late Onipa Nua, playing for pennies

imported music—and while listening you have to have a hamburger in your right hand and a can of Coke in your left." He is a purist, and his goal is simple: "I'm trying to repackage, reproduce, rearrange and re-present the highlife and traditional music of this country."

Ghana's most original music impresario, Helwani is virtually unknown in the United States or Europe. He produced some astonishing music in the '70s and '80s, when the country's cultural life suffered under a military dictatorship. He also helped form Ghana's musicians union, and he campaigns actively on behalf of African artists.

Helwani is an unlikely crusader for music from sub-Saharan Africa. He is a short, burly man who peppers his conversation with invective and can get so angry discussing his pet peeve—corruption and copying in the African music business—that sometimes he seems ready to burst a vein. He is rakishly casual, wearing tongs, a yellow shirt open to the chest and thin, blue

pants. He has a twisted hawk nose, an impish smile, graying hair, thick fingers and alert eyes.

In short, Helwani looks like a Lebanese Popeye; yes, he is white. His grandparents came to Ghana when it was a British colony and, except for the six years when he attended school in Lebanon, he has lived his entire life in Ghana. He is one of about 2,000 people of Lebanese descent in Ghana, which once was home to 10 times as many. While proud of his Lebanese heritage, he is married to a black Ghanaian and his children are biracial. He terms himself an "Arab-African" and apologizes for what he calls "mistakes" made by leaders of the Lebanese community in West Africa. (Many defended colonial interests in the region and, he says, "foolishly" failed to welcome independence.) To this day, however, Lebanese communities have remained in the region, despite the collapse of order in places such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, where—like Ghana—Lebanese traders play an important role in commerce.

in the streets of Accra. Nua, who sang in his native Hausa language, sometimes accompanied himself on a sardine can built to imitate a guitar. Before his death in 1990, he played for Ghana's leading politicians, and the two albums he released for Helwani are classics.

Helwani is also remembered for the Napoleon Club in the Osu neighborhood of Accra. During the '70s, he staged as many as three bands every night and hosted such legends as Nigeria's Fela Kuti. But he closed the club after a military curfew was imposed in 1981, and it never reopened. The curfew lasted for five years, and by then the streets of Accra were empty.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The best of the recent reissues from Helwani's Bibini label are E.T. Mensah's *All For You*, Onipa Nua's *I Feel Alright*, Hugh Masekela's *Rekpete* and the recent highlife-revival compilation *Uhuru*. These can be difficult to find outside of Ghana, as Helwani has no U.S. distributor. He does accept international mail orders at Bibini Music, PO Box 01225, Osu, Accra, Ghana (fax: 233-21-225871; phone: 233-21-225871).

For Ghana's newer sound, try Kojo Antwi, whose best albums are *Akuaba*, *Groovy* and the double CD *Afrafra*. Daddy Lumba, who vies with Antwi as king of Ghana's new wave, is well represented on his self-released *Aben Wo Aha*. These (and some of the Bibini titles above) are available through the London-based specialists Stern's (www.sternsmusic.com).



After withdrawing from music for most of the '90s, Helwani mounted a comeback a couple of years ago, partly in response to improved conditions in Ghana, but also to fight back against the multinational entertainment giants, who have been flooding sub-Saharan Africa with flimsy pop. He recently re-released about a dozen of his finest recordings from the '70s and '80s, including Nua's two albums, and *Rekpete*, a gem of an instrumental album featuring South African trumpeter Hugh Masakela and the shortlived Ghanaian band Hedzoleh.

But perhaps more significant is Helwani's support for a revival of the country's classic highlife sounds from the '50s and '60s. This exuberant music has been swept aside by rap, hip-hop and reggae but remains the pinnacle of Ghanaian musicality. Through the use of old musical scores and aging musicians (of the sort Ry Cooder assembled in Havana for his 1997 mega-hit *Buena Vista Social Club*), Helwani has created a living record of the old Ghana sound, which critics consider to be the first great period of modern African music. His finest album in this vein is *Uhuru*, released last year to great acclaim from DJs and a hit in clubs. A second volume of songs from the *Uhuru* sessions is due later this year.

Helwani also sponsors a weekly show on the big state-owned radio station, during which he showcases traditional musicians. Such music is now recognized as important by the government, which sponsors an accomplished high-life band through its national theater. He couldn't always count on such support, however. He recalls how, 20 years ago, "people said I was polluting the airwaves, polluting our culture."

In Helwani's eyes, the progress since then has been welcome but modest. While a fighter, he is no optimist. "Ghanaians won't easily come to see their own musical heritage as valuable, because the brainwashing has been done over 30 years," he says. "To undo this will take a hell of a long time."

Yet new Ghanaian music is on an upswing, largely on the strength of a series of remarkable albums by singer-songwriter Kojo Antwi, whose self-produced and self-released *Akuaba* album from last year is a high point. Antwi blends traditional highlife sounds

with American pop, reggae and influences from elsewhere in Africa. Though unknown in the United States, Antwi rivals Senegalese mega-star Youssou N'Dour, who is the biggest name in African music (so big he actually got an invite to the World Economic Forum in Davos this year, courtesy of pop impresario Quincy Jones, a longtime Davos participant). While Helwani objects to Antwi's use of electronics (on some of his cuts he plays all of the instruments), his songs rank with the best ever produced from West Africa.

Helwani may fail to credit the revived fortunes of Ghanaian music, but he gets the politics right. African musicians con-

tinue to struggle to find an audience, and European and U.S. record companies continue to ignore the sounds that come out of African clubs and studios—or insist on softening them for Western ears. N'Dour and lesser stars such as Antwi are increasingly unwilling to go along with that, no matter the cost in lost paydays. N'Dour, for instance, plans to expand his Dakar-based Joko label, used mainly to release his own music, sung in his native Woloff language. And Antwi shows that by producing and releasing his own records, he too can gain a growing audience—and with few compromises. This bodes well for the health of the region's indigenous music. ■

Medium Fool

By A.S. Hamrah

TV can be good in small doses. Hell, in small doses it can be great. But people don't shell out 8 or 10 bucks a pop for TV. Projected on a big screen, heard through state-of-the-

15 Minutes

Directed by John Herzfeld

Series 7

Directed by Daniel Minahan

art speakers, viewed from stadium seats amidst the drone and chirp of teenagers, the last thing anyone wants to see in a movie theater is more of the factory programming that cable unloads for pennies on a hundred channels 24 hours a day. TV's heightened notion of a lower reality is no match for the movies' too often lowered notion of a heightened reality, yet that doesn't make the *BattleBots*-ified, *Survivor*-ized world of TV programming any less enjoyable. It just isn't a night out. It's an evening that's called it a day.

So when the movies give themselves over to TV aesthetics and films begin to pass themselves off as trenchant commentary on the very methods they've succumbed to, all they get is muddy. *15 Minutes* and *Series 7* embrace a hate-the-message, love-the-way-the-messenger-is-dressed approach to debunking the video manipulation of reality that makes for the most compelling

stuff on TV today. Too bad their writer-directors have confused reality with reality programming. They've produced airtight, bloody episodes of Regis Philbin's eerie twilight zone of a gameshow, *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?*, with not a lifeline to be found, all the lifelines having been disconnected to pay the cable bill.

15 Minutes is a pumped-up episode from a mismatched buddy-cop show directed by John Herzfeld in the style of his sour-noir *2 Days in the Valley* (he likes numerals in his titles). The plot borrows heavily from *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* and *Man Bites Dog*, lower-budgeted movies that came out 10 years ago, and it has the dark, brooding qualities of those films with none of their insight or horror. *15 Minutes* follows

TV's heightened notion of a lower reality is no match for the movies' often lowered notion of a heightened reality.

Robert De Niro around in scenes left over from *Backdraft*; it's as technically sophisticated and unimaginative as Ron Howard at his best. Kelsey Grammer is in it too as some kind of

Geraldo Rivera type, but the potential fun of seeing De Niro and Grammer acting together—James Cagney meets Jack Benny, maybe—is lost in the murk.

De Niro, anyway, spends most of his time with Edward Burns, cinema's answer to *Melrose Place*'s Andrew Shue, or Melina Kanakaredes from the TV show *Providence*, who in her scenes as De Niro's TV-reporter girlfriend seems more like a daughter who's indulging him sweetly, even though the birthday present he just gave her came from the perfume counter at Eckerd's. The question of why De Niro is in this picture at all isn't answered in his performance as a New York homicide detective so improbably famous he routinely lands on the cover of *People*. He smartly checks out early, sparing himself from further degradation in scenes that unwisely recreate moments from Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* and *King of Comedy*, films that had both De Niro and something to say on the themes Herzfeld pretends to tackle here.

And what are those themes? Celebrity, celebrity crime, an intrusive celebrity mediascape in which—get this—"perception is reality." Someone says that in the film, evidently turning their perception into your reality with nothing more than an ali kazam. For the rest of the film they ball-peen it into your skull.

What happens is two crazy nuts come over from Eastern Europe and start killing people, all the while recording their murders with a video camera. Footage of their spree is broadcast on the big TV screen in Times Square, and they get the idea they can

escape prosecution with an insanity plea. The more dominant of the two, a Czech played by Czech actor Karel Roden, is so intense that when he

wouldn't occur to a guy who gives his characters names like Slovak and Warsaw that it might be injudicious to use the name of the immigrant filmmaker Capra to insult would-be immigrant filmmakers who might be watching his own movie.) *15 Minutes* then tendentiously points out that the ultimate in screen realism, the snuff film, is now within the grasp of anyone with a video camera. The Cain-and-Abel relationship of video to cinema that Godard recognized early on becomes a plea for Hollywood cops to throw away their tin badges and kill your television vigilante-style.

15 Minutes really believes in the power of TV to define experience for each and every one of us, and somewhere beneath that it believes Eastern Europeans have bad taste, they're very emotional, if they're women they're whorish, they like leopard prints, they think Americans are dumb and weak, and they say comical things like "the silence of the sheeps" when they mean "lambs." But it's pretty clear it's the audience who the filmmakers think are the sheeps here.

Series 7 is a much smarter film, although it too gives in to a predictable, TV-based despair. Combining plot elements from Elio Petri's 1965 Italian sci-fi film *The Tenth Victim* (in which Marcello Mastroianni is pursued most-dangerous-game-style by pretty assassins in a future of government-sponsored death hunts) and Peter Watkins' amazing, harrowing 1971 film *Punishment Park* (where counterculture dissidents are death-marched through the American desert and hunted by National Guardsmen instead of being jailed),



Series 7 is the most dangerous gameshow ...

smokes he looks as if he's about to eat his cigarette like it's a wasabi pea. The actorly reality-effect he achieves is like David Spade doing an impression of Tim Roth under torture. Herzfeld has named Roden's character Emile Slovak. Similarly, Burns' character, a goody-

and somewhere beneath that it believes Eastern Europeans have bad taste, they're very emotional, if they're women they're whorish, they like leopard prints, they think Americans are dumb and weak, and they say comical things like "the silence of the sheeps"



... while *15 Minutes* is too many.

goody fire marshal whose parents were from Poland, is named Jordy Warsaw.

Meanwhile, the film continues with a running joke about how nobody recognizes the name Frank Capra. (It figures it

rowing 1971 film *Punishment Park* (where counterculture dissidents are death-marched through the American desert and hunted by National Guardsmen instead of being jailed),

Series 7 (numbers again, they're so dehumanizing, don't you think?) puts its reality-based TV gameshow *The Contenders* on the screen exactly as if it were an episode from a reality-based TV gameshow, instead of *The Running Man*. The premise is that contestants are selected in a nationwide lottery to appear on *The Contenders*, then armed with Glocks and sent out to do each other in wherever they happen to be: home, mall, golf course, hospital. If they keep up the body count and stay alive, eventually they'll win money.

This slice-of-mediated-life was written and directed by Daniel Minahan, who co-wrote the excellent *I Shot Andy Warhol* (Warhol again), and it stars Brooke Smith, the fine actress who played Catherine Martin in *The Silence of the Lambs* (not sheeps). It's much funnier in its post-humanist, cartoony way than the overwrought non-satire of *15 Minutes*, but it's really nothing more than *Mad TV*-level parody—and like *15 Minutes* it's the sad kind of movie that would be improved by commercial breaks. A half-hour of it would have been effective; Minahan and Smith labor (she's playing pregnant) to fill its 85 minutes. Because its conceit is so restrictive—Minahan only allows us to see the TV show *The Contenders*—there's no real chance for any contact with recognizable humanity. Every moment in the life depicted by *Series 7* is a TV moment, and that's Minahan's point, and so what?

Series 7 does have a beautiful, hilarious scene that stands out. It's a parody of the kind of video that high-school art students might have made in the '80s, a new-wavey project scored to Joy Division's "Love Will Tear Us Apart." It features Smith and another Contender who just happens to have been her high school boyfriend. He's now a sexually confused lousy artist stricken with testicular cancer. In the video they romp around their suburban town, engaging in New Romantic poses copped from the album covers of English synth acts. (Cancer of the testicle, by the way, is a movie trope now, like in *Fight Club*; as is the shot of the head in the toilet seen from the bottom of the bowl that *Series 7* shares

with *15 Minutes*.) Later, the Joy Division song is blared from speakers in their high school stadium as these last two Contenders face each other in the inevitable showdown that pits human feeling against the demands of television content. But the reprise of "Love Will Tear Us Apart" ruins the earlier scene. It trivializes something that was touching because of how trivial it was.

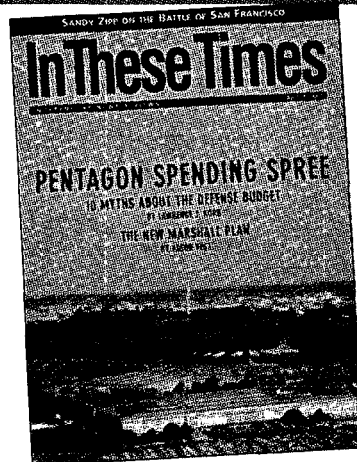
Did Minahan mean to show how TV can ruin memories by misappropriating them and making them into overdetermined, Mickey-Moused background music? Who can say for sure? Minahan mingles so thoroughly with the object of his scorn that he can't separate from it. *Series 7* never cracks, it's true. His film may be revenge for all the segments he had to produce for tabloid-TV news magazines earlier in his career, but those spots take their revenge on him as well: His movie just looks like a TV show, and it doesn't have the virtue of being ephemeral. It bears the burden of satirizing something that's already a joke.

Television, which has been described by the media theorist Jeffrey Scheuer as inherently conservative, is now far in advance of the American cinema as seen in the multiplex. For some reason, reality-TV—and who needs a list of shows?—is forcing the Hollywood cinema into a weird, reactionary position in which it thinks its only defense, its only hope to maintain interest, is to absorb TV techniques and blow them up to 35 mm. But TV moves too fast. The movies have been trying since the '80s, but they can't keep up. That, as Drew Barrymore said in *Charlie's Angels*, is called kicking your ass.

Movies need to do something else now. As we move into a period when the differences between TV and cinema are harder and harder to figure out, that's the only real hope the movies have. But do the people who make them even want that, or do they just want the same kind of fame that's canted in *15 Minutes* and giped with so much knowing skill in *Series 7*? If that's what it's come to, you're better off watching cable with the lights on. ■

A.S. Hamrah writes for *Hermenaut and Suck.com*.

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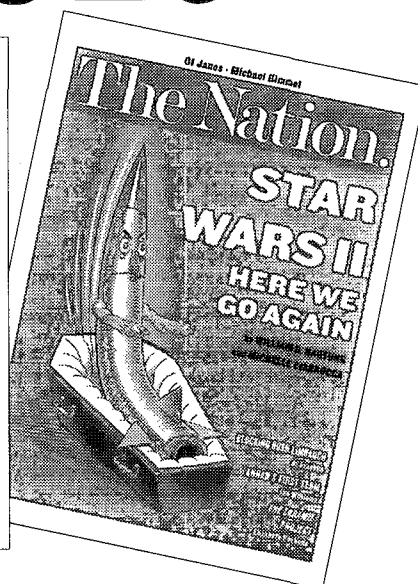
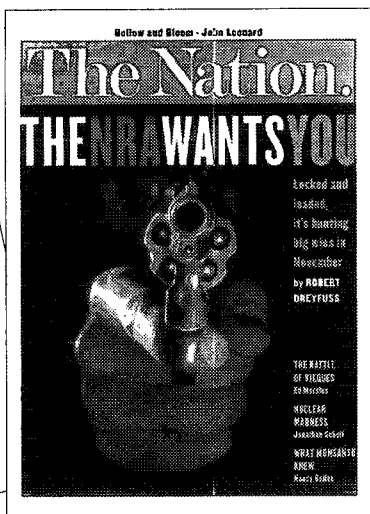
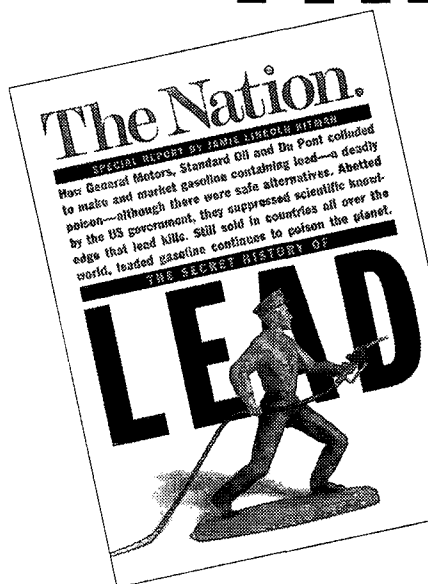
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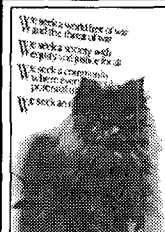
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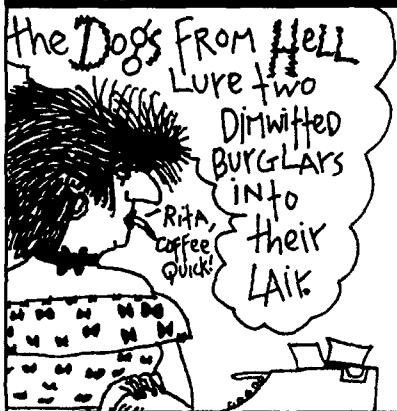
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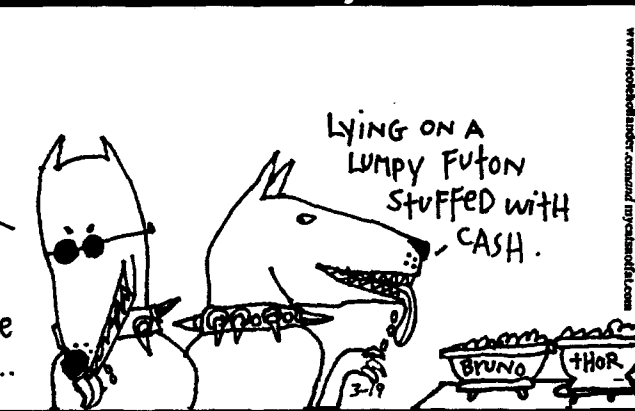
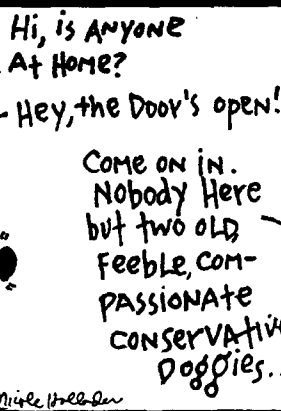


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By Nicole Hollander

Continued from page 38

Here is what we do: Send another voluptuous, crafty Jewish Generation Xer to seduce the president. Call it Operation Queen Esther, after the brave Jewess who saved her people in ancient times by getting cozy with the gentile king, a noble lesson I learned so many years ago as an impressionable tot in Hebrew school. It's just fighting fire with fire, Bush with bush.

Yes, what we feminists need is a juicy White House scandal—certainly one involving SEX. Not an anemic DUI or drug-taking scandal or the bombing of a helpless Third World nation, which, as we've seen, no one really cares about. A scandal involving sex is the only one guaranteed way to really make headlines and capture the fancy of the people with the real power: the twenty- and thirty-something male late-night comedy writers who fill the evening air waves and determine the country's political agenda. After all, to them, nothing can guarantee more yuks and laffs than a Hoover-Jay Leno still makes hay out of the Lewinsky scandal to this day.

This will be especially effective to bring down, and not just shame and embarrass, the current administration. After all, with the Republicans, it's the rock to their scissors. The one major claim of superiority that Dubya holds over Clinton is "moral righteousness" (read: no sex scandal). While Clinton never pretended to be a choirboy and admitted all along to have "caused pain in my marriage," the Republicans have gloated endlessly in the past several months about "restoring dignity to the White House." In other words, I'm hoping for a Speaker-Elect Bob Livingston redux. (But of course, we do risk facing the time-honored Republican defense strategy of saying it was a "youthful indiscretion." So far they haven't used that for anyone past the age of 50, but they've come pretty close.)

And, no matter what the gamble, think of the expense this will save already beleaguered feminist groups—who won't have to do all those dreary mailings, collate all those photocopies, conduct all that tedious lobbying and hire all those extra temps. Our only challenge is finding the proper Jewish Gen Xer with a strategically face-slimming haircut. My first impulse is to make a Nader supporter do it, as an appropriate and long-overdue act of penance for getting us into this quagmire to begin with.

But after much rumination and soul searching, I have decided to personally step forward. And what a sacrifice it is! The gals in the French Resistance had it easy with their amateurish missions of smuggling supplies across Nazi lines. But, for the good of womankind, I am willing to face even more harrowing dangers and stand up to the most scathing public ridicule. (And, not incidentally, watch my book's sales ranking on Amazon blow through the roof!)

But I can't approach Dubya as myself. I need a guise to be properly welcomed into the White House. So, here's the plan: I will pose as a fundamentalist Christian pro-abstinence activist, Tammy Faye Cherry. Bush will eagerly admit me to a private meeting because of my catchy new pilot campaign for chastity for unmarried women over 30.

Our affair, not to be rushed, will start slowly and tenderly, with the exchange of whimsical gifts. I'll get Dubya the director's cut of the original *Stepford Wives* movie. He'll share with me the secret three-part Skull and Bones handshake. Then, oh so gradually, my true fiery Semitic passion will eventually rise to the surface and win him over. I will lure him in for the kill by offering to do ALL of the things that Laura would find the most risqué and humiliating, such as talking dirty about the Dewey Decimal system. And of course, as a last resort, I'll reveal my secret erotic trick, the Kennebunkport.

But I have to be very careful. I can't bear to do this more than once. (I'm a hero, not a saint.) I have to make sure that, as I compromise his integrity, not to also compromise the integrity of his key DNA sample. So, I'll take no chances, arriving at our long-anticipated meeting wearing a lab coat, hair net, eye goggles and rubber gloves, and carrying a full set of test tubes and Petri dishes. I'll just cross my fingers and hope that he harbors a secret fantasy of doing it with a randy lab technician.

And then, armed with only my own courage, sense of justice—and at least 3 full milligrams of Xanax—I will carry out my mission.

After we get the lab results back, I'll leak the news to the press and brave the political firestorm to follow—and, of course, the pressures of celebrity and dealing with the media. In the inevitable interview with Barbara Walters, I can see myself now lying prostrate before millions of TV viewers, confessing my deep remorse, sense of shame, long-lived insecurities and lingering self-hatred. And: "Yes," I'll add, "the lipstick shade is 'glace.' That's g-l-a-c-e. Glace."

So, young male comedy writers, get ready. Your jobs are about to get a whole lot easier. And the laughs will get stronger and stronger, until they peak at the targeted day of impeachment. And then, to be sure, my personal sacrifice—both so honourous and onerous—will pay off in saving generations of women to come, or at least those in the next four years. ■

Paula Kamen is the author of *Her Way: Young Women Remake the Sexual Revolution* (NYU Press).

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Operation Queen Esther



My Secret Plot To Bring Down the President

By Paula Kamen

On the surface, at the dawn of the Bush administration's Old World Order, things look pretty gloomy for feminists. Right-wing fundamentalist men in their fifties and sixties, some cast directly from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, have taken over all three branches of the federal government. A disquieting percentage have affiliations to an obscure fringe Southern university with the name "Bob" in the title.

At the same time, generally unprepared to defend their sexual freedoms, young women lack a sense of women's history, even for events as recent as the '60s and '70s. They think *Roe v. Wade* is the newest midseason replacement character on *Walker, Texas Ranger*, and that *The Feminine Mystique* is the latest fragrance from Estee Lauder. Through the '90s, many have come to define political rebellion strictly in personal terms, by watching *Charlie's Angels*, reading *Cosmo*, defiantly wearing hotpants and stiletto heels, and writing memoirs about their affairs with their fathers—all acts with limited potential indeed to get rid of John Ashcroft.

But thanks to my secret plan, there's hope.

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